

August 18, 2020 • \$7.99

Washington Examiner



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— Nancy Pelosi in a statement supporting the Obama/Biden payroll tax holiday in 2011

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— President Barack Obama in a speech in 2011

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— Vice President Joe Biden in USA Today in 2011

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Kamala Harris, the cancel culture cop

Joe Biden would rather sate the appetites of his party's culture warriors than unite a divided nation.

That's the central lesson from his choice of Sen. Kamala Harris as a running mate.

Harris is a vindictive culture war cop whose political and prosecutorial career has been built upon punishing those she finds deplorable. Biden has just raised the stakes of the 2020 election and relinquished his claim to being a "safe pick."

Not in our lifetimes has a nominee's running mate been so consequential. His choice matters more than normal, not only because he is very old and clearly in decline but also because he is running to be a placeholder president. Biden was nominated not for his own virtues but for his own lack of the politically deadly vices that beset his opponents in this year's primary.

It is thus shocking that he would pick such a divisive No. 2, whose unpopularity outside the core Democratic base is abundantly evident. Harris collapsed in the presidential polls almost the moment she stepped into the national spotlight. Despite being amply funded, she went from tied for second place at 15% in mid-July 2019 to low single digits by September.

Harris's favorability is underwater among independents, with 33% unfavorable to 25% favorable, and during her presidential run, she was never above water.

Harris is not the pick Biden would make if he were trying to maximize his chances of winning the election. This is baffling if you believe, as the cable networks and graying old editorial pages have screamed, that getting rid of President Trump is of the utmost importance for the survival of the republic.

No, you pick Harris if you are beholden to your party's woke culture warriors. The Left has largely won the culture war, securing gay marriage, saving *Roe v. Wade*,

and normalizing transgender ideology. Now, they want to punish all dissenters. This is Harris's area of expertise. You can call it "cancel culture," but that term is too benign when it comes to Harris. She is not a mere demagogue. She is a demagogue who will use the power of the federal government to punish "the other side."

"She is a dead-on prosecutor," her mentor Willie Brown wrote, "and when she goes into that mode, watch out. She is out for blood."

As California attorney general, Harris prosecuted and persecuted pro-life undercover filmmaker David Daleiden for his work exposing Planned Parenthood's trade in fetal remains. She seized his recordings while pursuing the abortion lobby's endorsement for Senate. She was also the first prosecutor ever to use California's eavesdropping laws against a journalist, all after secret consultations with the abortion provider.

The federal government should treat pro-lifers like segregationists, Harris has

argued publicly. A clear majority of the public, about 70%, believe there should be restrictions on abortion, but Harris wants to treat states that pass restrictions as if they are acting outside the bounds of democratic legitimacy. She's called the Knights of Columbus "extremist."

She will attack "the bad guys" on the flimsiest grounds. Recall her bizarre line of questioning about the "Kasowitz law firm" during Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings. When Kavanaugh looked confused by the questions, Kamala's cheerleaders in the media credited her with a beautiful "prosecutorial beatdown." It turns out there was actually nothing there but innuendo — empty badgering to make a political opponent look bad is just what an abusive prosecutor does in front of a jury. It's her style.

Harris's presidential campaign was focused on dividing the country. Gun owners, pro-lifers, home-schoolers, and traditional religions all will have reason to fear persecution in an administration where Harris has sway. We know she will have sway because the culture-war wing obviously calls the tune in Biden's Democratic Party. There's no other reason he would pick her over a less divisive choice.

Biden will probably continue to talk about reuniting a country divided by Trump's presidency. But as of today, nobody should believe it. ★



A referendum on the socialism behind the mask

Joe Biden has made his presidential campaign all about one man: Donald Trump. Indeed, the presumptive Democratic presidential candidate has said very little about what he's campaigning *for*, but a lot about who he's campaigning against.

The goal is to make the November election a referendum on Trump, which Democrats seem to think is a winning strategy. Convince voters that Biden is the only thing standing in between them and four more years of Trumpian chaos, and they'll turn out for a candidate who still draws little enthusiasm from his own party.

But the Democratic Party is underestimating the electorate. To be sure, voters are displeased with Trump and the way he's handled recent crises, if the polls are to be believed. But voters also care about issues and the larger debate that surrounds them. When it comes to healthcare, for example, 81% of voters said in a poll earlier this year that this debate will be very important come November. More than 84% said the same of the economy.

Trump seems to understand this, because his reelection pitch to voters is not about Biden, but about the ideology that Biden's election threatens to usher in: socialism. Already, Trump's new campaign manager, Bill Stepien, has worked overtime to paint Biden as an empty vessel for leftist extremists to exploit. Biden might be a self-proclaimed centrist, Stepien argued, but the people he's surrounded himself with, the ones who will run the show, are not.

Stepien has a point: Biden has already caved to the Left on several issues, including healthcare, student loan forgiveness, and climate change. He asked Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, an out-and-proud socialist, to sit on his climate

change task force. And his decision to choose Sen. Kamala Harris as his running mate confirms that Biden isn't as averse to the far Left's aggressive culture war as he's made himself out to be.

Harris, we know from experience, is no moderate. When her voting record in the Senate was compared to every other Senate Democrat's, hers was second only to Sen. Elizabeth Warren in terms of how far to the left she had voted. Harris endorsed and co-sponsored the Green New Deal, advocated for late-term abortion, co-sponsored Medicare for All, and argued for the repeal of tax cuts. She even tried to impose a religious litmus test on Catholic judicial nominees. Put simply, she's a radical in sheep's clothing, and she doesn't really care who knows it.

This upends the Democrats' argument that Biden is a safer choice. There is nothing safe about socialism. Only

28% of the public views it favorably.

Today's Democratic Party doesn't seem to care. If anything, Democrats are so worried about angering the far Left that they'll do just about anything to appease it. In the party's 2020 platform, Democrats gave a nod to "Medicare for all" advocates and admitted that the policy has some appeal. Biden has openly promised to raise taxes and, worse, undo some aspects of Trump's tax reform, even as the United States suffers from economic upheaval thanks to the coronavirus pandemic.

Worst of all, Democrats still can't bring themselves to disavow antifa, a radical, violent, and revolutionary group that has destroyed private and public property and injured dozens of law enforcement officers throughout riots in certain cities that initially had to do with George Floyd's death, but really haven't had anything to do with that for months now.

This is not a winning agenda. If Democrats aren't careful, they could end up forcing voters to ask not whether they could stick with Trump for four more years, but whether they can afford *not* to. ★



CAROLYN KASTER/AP

Book Your Bucket List



Zaanse Schans, Holland, The Netherlands

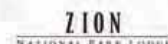
Some Things Are **Worth Waiting For.**

2020 has been challenging in so many ways, and staying home for all the right reasons has still taken its toll on all of us. COVID-19 has changed the world, from how we engage in everyday life to how we celebrate our special moments. The events of 2020 have meant that calendars marked up with days to look forward to—trips, celebrations of all kinds including birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, reunions, all types of gatherings—events that fuel our joy and our memories, have been reduced to notes on a calendar, never realized. Too many moments that have passed us by this year, for all the right reasons.

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Biden's transformation, and what it portends for America

Do you want America to be transformed? If, like me, you'd welcome (among other things) more public politeness, less disingenuous political debate, and an end to the slander that this country is systemically racist, then perhaps you'll answer "yes." But I bet you agree that those would be restorations, not innovations, a revival of lost qualities that made America more admirable decades ago than it is now.

That's not what Joe Biden has in mind when he promises to "transform" this great nation as president. He's thinking, if the rusty turning of his mental cogs can be described thus, about transformation along lines proposed by the Left. He won the Democratic primary as a centrist alternative to the whackos onstage with him, but then tacked sharply toward them to scoop up Bernie Sanders's socialist supporters. Now, he's confirmed that new direction — also that he'll follow rather than lead his base — by picking Kamala Harris as his running mate.

She's one of the nastier pieces of work among Democrats, which is a high bar. Her demagogic presidential run, venomous questioning of Brett Kavanaugh at his Supreme Court confirmation hearing, and unprincipled embrace of extreme policies such as socialized medicine and the Green New Deal — she dropped them when she saw they were unpopular — all suggest she'll make our politics uglier if given the chance, and our governance more detached from the founding principles that brought the brilliant successes of our past.

This week's magazine, a Democratic convention special issue, focuses on the policies of the Left, and on Biden's presidential agenda in particular. Damir Marusic looks (P.16) into what we can expect from Joe's foreign policy; it will be deliberately more ameliorative than Trump's, but will it be more effective?

Nic Rowan examines (P.12) the dilemma Biden faces in policies that his administration, should voters grant him one, will adopt toward religious faith, and Catholicism specifically. As President Barack Obama's Catholic sidekick, he could privately oppose his boss's anti-Catholic policies (taking nuns to court to force them to pay for abortifacients and contraceptives, for example) knowing he'd be ignored. But at the top of the ticket, he'll have to embrace policies handed to him by his intolerant secular masters in the party base.

Joe Simonson lays out (P.19) the contours of Biden's economic policies. Biden's approach will be essentially the one Obama took, with lamentable results, in 2008. The Obama recovery was among the slowest on record. Unemployment stayed high — remember the "summer of recovery" that was forecast year after year after year? — with key voter groups' anger over slow growth bought off with costly federal subsidies. There will, of course, be less pressure on China and, inevitably, higher taxes.

Rounding out our coverage (aside from all the other great features, columns, and Life & Arts coverage), Robert Showah takes apart (P.26) the Democratic myth of the "rigged" Senate and shows how it's really no more than a flimsy excuse for removing checks and balances upon which our republic was built. ★

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Long List of Shortages Including Dr. Pepper

Toilet paper shortages, mask shortages, and cleaning supply shortages are old news now. The pandemic and the lockdowns have spurred a second and third wave of shortages.

This is not normal in America. Our free market economy has typically prevented or curtailed shortages because once demand outstrips supply, the price system gives producers and distributors extra incentive to stock the shelves. We think of command economies when we think of shortages. The bread line in Russia is the standard image.

The coronavirus has changed things. People may want something, and businesses may want to make it or import it, but sometimes lockdowns make that impossible or illegal.

Hence, our odd set of shortages this August.

America is having its first-ever Dr. Pepper shortage, for instance. Sales rose more than 6% in the second quarter of 2020, and the Dr. Pepper factories haven't been able to keep up. This is part of a bigger shortage: the aluminum shortage.

Brewers are putting more and more beer into cans, as glass bottles are a little less hip these days. Then, there's the massive boom in seltzer, hard and soft. Flavored seltzers such as La Croix have seen massive growth in recent years as people look for calorie-free drinks that don't taste like artificial sweetener. And, of course, there's White Claw, the alco-



holic seltzer, which represents the fastest growing beverage in America.

President Trump's new aluminum shortages could exacerbate the aluminum can shortage.

Timber is also in short supply, because so many lumberjacks couldn't go to work during lockdowns. You can see this firsthand if you live in a place such as Naples, Florida, where old boardwalks can't get replaced because there's not enough wood.

There's more (less?).

Walk into a store, and you're likely to see signs about the national coin shortage. There's a gun shortage, as well.

One day, this virus won't be the terror that it is today, and maybe then, you can grab a Dr. Pepper, a White Claw, and a gun a little more easily than you can today.

—By Timothy P. Carney

Grapes of Wrath

California's Central Valley is the most important place you've never heard of. And it's falling apart.

The Central Valley is America's breadbasket. The fertile land sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and the Sierra Nevada accounts for just 1% of U.S. farmland, but it produces about 40% of the nation's fruits and nuts and a quarter of all total food.

Agriculture is the backbone of the largely blue-collar valley. The city of Tulare, with a population of only about 65,000 people, hosts the World Ag Expo. The 2018 version of the event featured Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue, and it annually hosts more than 100,000 attendees from more than 50 countries.

The coronavirus pandemic is assaulting the Central Valley on two fronts. The



A pistachio orchard in Tulare, Calif.

area has been singled out as a coronavirus hot spot by the White House task force. The positivity rate of Central Valley counties outpace the state's average, and hospitals are getting close to capacity.

Meanwhile, the lockdowns have kicked an already struggling Central Valley economy while it was down. Central Valley counties have some of the lowest median incomes in the state, and the state's inability (or unwillingness) to provide the region with the water it needs has led to the slow deterioration of the valley's economy. Rolling lockdowns have taken that deterioration and sped it up.

Now they're caught in an unending cycle. Agriculture can't be put on pause or done from home, and non-agricultural businesses can't afford sustained lockdowns. They go to work, leading to an increase in infections, which causes the state to step in and impose stricter lockdowns, leading to more economic hardship.

Between water concerns, the coronavirus, and the wide-scale lockdowns, the breadbasket of the nation is reeling. Each passing day pushes the country closer to a food supply crisis as the Central Valley gets closer and closer to the point of no return.

—By Zachary Faria

The COVID-19 Great Awakening

People of faith have long believed that tribulation can serve some sort of good. In the age of coronavirus, that good could be a new spiritual revival, in which people turn to religion for comfort and peace during a time of uncertainty.

Those in the United States who are already religious have said that the coronavirus pandemic has deepened their faiths, even though churches have been unable to meet and in-person fellowship has been limited. Many scholars predict that this trend will ebb outward and affect those who might not currently consider themselves religious too.

"This pandemic is making everyone acutely aware of the fragility of life," Greg Sterling, the dean of Yale Divinity School, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "We all know attendance had been falling in churches before, but people are spiritual, and I think the need to connect to God may be greater after this is over."

Is it any wonder why? The coronavirus



has forced us to confront the one thing many spend their entire lives avoiding: life's fragility. And then, there are the many human costs that have accompanied COVID-19: an economic collapse, social and physical losses, and dozens of new regulations that seem bent on keeping us apart. In other words, the outlets many people might look to for relief and comfort simply are no longer an option. So, they're turning to God.

Religious leaders across the country have confirmed that interest and involvement in services have increased despite the regulations keeping houses of worship from opening. Rev. Rachel Cornwell, the senior pastor of Dumbarton United Methodist Church in Maryland, said virtual attendance and engagement in midweek classes have been higher during the shutdown than it was before the coronavirus.

"People were saying things like, 'I'm engaged in church more now than I was,'" Cornwell told *U.S. News & World Report*. "They said it felt more intimate because ministers are speaking from their homes or doing meditations from various places. People feel like they're being let into their lives."

The question now is whether that rise in interest will become a long-term commitment. That is, after all, what faith is all about.

—By Kaylee McGhee

FDA Takes on Faux Hangover Remedies

Famed hangover cures are as old as drinking (give or take a few hours). What's new is the aggressive marketing of them. And the authorities are not pleased by the development.

The Food and Drug Administration wants you to avoid heavy boozing altogether, but if you have a lapse in judgment (or plan to later tonight), don't trust the folks promising you a miracle cure in the morning. The companies peddling Happy Hour Vitamins and Hangover Heaven's Nightlife Prep Supplement (its IV hydration treatments, which are basically post-party outpatient procedures, have also been compromised) were threatened with FDA warning letters recently.

Seven companies recently received such letters for marketing and selling unapproved dietary supplements claiming



to "cure, treat, mitigate or prevent hangovers," a violation of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. In other words, the supplements were pretending to be bona fide drugs, much like Michelob Ultra pretends to be beer. The agency has required each company to respond within 15 working days with details about correcting violations or face potential legal action.

Now, it doesn't loudly market them as such, but the FDA does acknowledge some over-the-counter foods and drugs that offer relief for "overindulgence in alcohol." Those include acetaminophen, aspirin, caffeine, and some other -ides and -ates not too easily pronounced.

The agency doesn't recommend those remedies because it would really rather you not drink. It was unambiguous in its press statement about the letters, saying (emphasis added), "Dietary supplements that claim to cure, treat, mitigate, or prevent hangovers could potentially harm consumers, particularly young adults, who may be led to believe that using these products, rather than drinking in moderation or not at all, can prevent or mitigate health problems caused by consuming too much alcohol."

Since hangover cures have gone from folk recipes cooked up by your roommate to who-knows-what sold by capitalists, it seems fitting that the job of telling you not to drink too hard has shifted from your mother and father to the FDA.

—By Jeremy Beaman

The Policing Debate That Wasn't

Following a weekend of unrest and violence in Chicago, the city's Black Lives Matter organization called on

Democratic officials to abolish the Chicago Police Department completely. Only then would the rights of black people be secured, the group said in a statement.

But it seems the majority of black people disagree, according to a recent poll. More than 80% of them said they wanted the police presence in their neighborhoods to stay the same, even though less than 1 in 5 said they're "very confident" that they'd be treated by officers with the courtesy and respect they are due. In other words, black people might not always trust the police or even respect them, but they understand the importance of preventative policing and want it to remain consistent in their communities.

These answers put the African American community at odds with the activist groups claiming to represent them, such as BLM Chicago. While the vast majority of black people agree that reform is necessary, very few want to burn the system to the ground. And very few believe that their rights would be more secure if the "Defund the Police" movement were to succeed.

There is ample evidence proving black people are right to be concerned. Take, for example, the Minneapolis neighborhood that collectively decided not to call the police unless absolutely necessary. Most residents in the neighborhood were white and agreed that they lived with a privilege their black neighbors had never enjoyed. So, they decided to do away with law enforcement within their community.

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A few weeks later, multiple residents admitted to the *New York Times* that crime and homelessness in the area had become such a problem that they were no longer letting their children play outside. One resident even said he was robbed at gunpoint. The point is this: You can get rid of law enforcement, but you'll never be able to get rid of the reasons why law enforcement exists in the first place.

The African American community understands that principle, as does the rest of the nation. Don't let the vocal few convince you otherwise.

—By Kaylee McGhee

Wear a Mask. No, Not That One

Debates over when and where to wear a mask apparently aren't enough (British officials say to wear one during sex). Now, we have debates over which masks to wear.

It's not totally new: The arguments have been going on since the beginning of a lockdown. But a recent study has thrust the question into the spotlight.

Scientists at Duke University used a laser beam to spot the number of tiny droplets coming from the mouth of someone speaking. They then measured how different masks (they tested 14 of them) affected the number of droplets and published the study in early August.

In general, almost all types of masks dramatically reduced the number of droplets, they found. This is helpful because droplets carry the virus and cause it to spread. N95s without valves and paper



surgical masks provided the most protection. Cotton masks, including homemade ones, did better. Some were worse.

The researchers weren't trying to produce an exhaustive study of mask efficacy, but rather were demonstrating a laboratory technique for measuring the efficacy. Nevertheless, the press and social media users took it as a study showing which were the good masks and which were the bad ones.

The "gaiter-type neck fleece" was the bad guy, supposedly increasing the number of particles emitted by a speaker. Get ready to be canceled if you wear one of those. And you wouldn't be the first to take flack for your choice of mask.

Alyssa Milano, the former *Who's the Boss* star who is now a Democratic activist, received plenty of mockery in May over her mask. In a tweet imploring everyone to mask up, Milano included a picture of her masked family. The problem: Her own mask was a work of crochet by her mother, and it was just as porous as you'd expect. Quite a few Milano droplets look like they could escape through there.

Milano defended herself on Twitter, writing "Assholes, mask has a carbon filter in it. So, yes, it might be crochet but totally safe."

And if you own an N95 mask with a valve, you may be experiencing whiplash. Back in late March, they were cutting edge. Come April, health writers were calling them "evil valved masks" that should be banned.

The Duke study found valved N95 masks eliminating 85% of droplets, placing it in the middle of the pack.

Oh, for the days when a man or woman could wear what he or she wanted without worrying about being judged.

—By Timothy P. Carney

Outta Cash

Visit a store in a U.S. city, and you're bound to see a sign near the check-out line that reads: "Credit or debit cards only." Cash is strictly prohibited because, like most of us, store owners aren't sure whether the coronavirus can spread via surface contact. To mitigate that risk, they've banned the exchange of cash temporarily.

But, to use an oft-used phrase from this pandemic, cashless may be the new normal.

The United States was already moving away from hard cash before the pandemic, since most of us are now completely dependent on technology and the internet that services it. We do our banking through an app on our phones, our credit cards are connected to dozens of easy-pay services such as Venmo, and few transactions give customers the opportunity to pull out cash.

The coronavirus pandemic seems to have solidified the public's preference for digital, no-contact payments — not



"Short day at school. The computers are down."

WORD OF THE WEEK

‘Factoids’

The word “factoid,” I learned this week, is not a word for “factlet; or a ‘little bit of arcana,’ which is the CNN meaning,” as William Safire put it. Instead, it comes from Norman Mailer’s picture-book biography of Marilyn Monroe (“It has been obvious for some time,” said a 1980 book review in the *New York Times*, “that Marilyn Monroe is a character Norman Mailer would have liked to invent”). Factoids, in Mailer’s coinage, are “facts which have no existence before appearing in a magazine or newspaper, creations which are not so much lies as a product to manipulate emotion in the Silent Majority.”

At the risk of inventing a cute neologism, what we have in journalism right now is a culture replete with “offensoids” — phrases or linguistic slights that had no inherently offensive existence prior to being declared as such by a magazine or newspaper. Sometimes, these come from journalists themselves, other times from outside pressure campaigns.

One such example comes from an open letter written by leaders of

left-leaning groups, including former top Obama staffer Valerie Jarrett, to “News Division Heads, Editors in Chiefs, Bureau Chiefs, Political Directors, Editors, Producers, Reporters, and Anchors”:

“A woman VP candidate, and possibly a Black or Brown woman candidate, requires the same kind of internal consideration about systemic inequality as you undertook earlier this year. Anything less than full engagement in this thoughtful oversight would be a huge step backwards for the progress you have pledged to make to expand diversity of thought and opportunity in your newsrooms and in your coverage.” The whole thing is written with the tone of an ultimatum. “As we enter another historic moment, we will be watching you.”

Here are some of the specific verboten verbiages: For one, “Re-

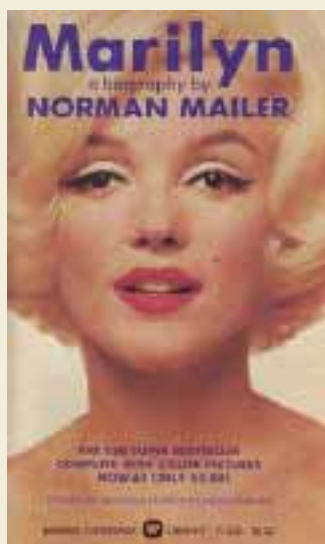
porting, even as asides in a story, on a woman’s looks, weight, tone of voice, attractiveness, and hair is sexist news coverage unless the same analysis is applied to every candidate.” As the Donald Trump presidency has taught us, no man’s absurd hair, weight, or coloring would ever be mocked in the press. Another: “Reporting on whether a woman is liked (a subjective metric

at best) as though it is news when the ‘likeability’ of men is never considered a legitimate news story.” Pete Buttigieg and Ted Cruz would like a word on whether male politicians’ likability factor is ever adjudicated in the press.

The worst offense to good sense in the letter is this: “Reporting on and using pictures of a woman’s, particularly black women, show of anger at injustice or any other kind of passion in communication perpetuates racist tropes that suggest unfairly that women are too emotional or irrational in their leadership or worse ‘hate America.’” Apparently, this asinine logic would have you believe the subjects praised in feminist magazine writer Rebecca Traister’s recent book, *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women’s Anger*, were actually being viciously attacked. Or that erstwhile VP shortlister Karen Bass praised Fidel Castro’s regime earlier in her life because she, in fact, loved America’s foreign policy in Latin America.

It’s not necessary to examine the wisdom of the rhetorical tendency of Democrats to get burned by wrapping themselves in the flag and then setting it on fire. What Word of the Week readers ought to take note of is that political hacks are telling writers that they can’t so much as air certain issues, because the words necessary to discuss those issues are off-limits. This is profoundly anti-journalistic, and it’s creepy, particularly when done on behalf of offensoids.

—By Nicholas Clairmont



just because it’s easier, but also because it’s safer. A 2017 study of \$1 bills passed around New York City found traces of bacteria and viruses from humans, horses, gray wolves, and wild boar all over the bills. Nothing about that is sanitary. And now that many people are, perhaps, more health-conscientious than they were in the past, it’s easy to understand why cash isn’t an ideal option anymore.

Indeed, cash is so sparse nowadays

that the U.S. is experiencing a national coin shortage — meaning not that there are fewer coins, but that the circulation of those coins has stopped almost completely.

As with most technological shocks, the retreat from cash will be convenient for the well-off and a huge hassle for the working class. Some 8 million U.S. households are “unbanked,” according to a 2017 survey by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corpora-

tion, which means they rely on money orders, pawnshop loans, payday loans, and other forms of immediate payments throughout their day-to-day lives. Without cash on hand, an unbanked person could struggle to pay for essentials, since access to online credit isn’t guaranteed. Indeed, almost 30% of people in the U.S. don’t own credit cards, according to a 2014 Gallup poll.

But the unbanked (or the folks who like cash) won’t likely get a say. The decision has been made that it’s time for change.

—By Kaylee McGhee



God & Man On the Trail

**Biden can no longer hide from
his party's anti-Catholic agenda**

By Nicholas Rowan

When Joe Biden promised last month to reinstate a contraception mandate on the Little Sisters of the Poor, he ditched the last of his previous moderation on religious issues.

Biden's statement, which came after the Supreme Court freed the Little Sisters from the mandate, was expected: The former vice president has moved steadily left on social issues since declaring his candidacy last April. Biden used to support the Hyde Amendment, which bars federally funded abortions. Now, he opposes it. In the Senate, he opposed adding transgender protections to a gay-rights pledge. Now, he calls transgender rights the "civil rights issue of our time." He has even flipped on the Little Sisters case itself. He privately opposed the Obama-era contraception mandate until the Supreme Court in July overruled it. Now, he promises to "restore" the old policy.

The reversals perfectly illustrate the Biden conundrum. He is running as the establishment centrist: He opposes Medicare For All, called for cracking down on looters and violent protesters during anti-police demonstrations, is more hawkish on foreign policy than much of his party and less critical of environmental bugaboos such as fracking. His surge of primary victories came thanks to other candidates coalescing behind him as the way to stop Bernie Sanders's socialist agenda. Yet social issues have become nonnegotiable for too many Democrats.

And then there is his faith. Joe Biden has always maintained his Catholicism plays a role in his life. In an increasingly radical and anti-Catholic party, Biden must walk a fine line.

Meanwhile, his coreligionist critics say that he cannot claim to be a faithful Catholic and support policies contradicting church teaching. Biden has always responded that his religion is a personal matter and that he will not "impose" his beliefs on others. But in the 2020 race,

there are few moderates, left or right — and Biden's balancing act is teetering.

Biden's troubles began with the Hyde Amendment. He had always voted for it while in the Senate, along with other measures restricting abortion. But when he reaffirmed his support last June, near-



Biden used to support the Hyde Amendment, which bars federally funded abortions. Now, he opposes it. In the Senate, he opposed adding transgender protections to a gay-rights pledge. Now, he calls transgender rights the 'civil rights issue of our time.'



ly every candidate in the then-crowded field, as well as every prominent abortion advocacy group, lashed out at him. His top opponents, Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Sanders, and Kamala Harris, condemned his opinion as retrograde, with Sanders explaining that there is “no middle ground on women’s rights.”

Biden flipped the next day, saying that “circumstances have changed” on the issue.

This created a bigger problem than credibility damage from flip-flopping on such a high-profile issue. Biden’s newfound opposition to the Hyde Amendment stripped him of his claim to moderation on abortion — and exposed him to a new line of attacks. Later

that year, Robert Morey, a priest in South Carolina, denied him communion on the grounds that Biden had effectively tossed himself out of the church.

“Holy Communion signifies we are one with God, each other, and the Church,” Morey said. “Our actions should reflect that. Any public figure who advocates for abortion places himself or herself outside of Church teaching.”

Biden refused to speak about the incident when prodded by PBS’s Judy Woodruff beyond saying that, in the past, Pope Francis had given him communion.

The dispute echoed a similar battle fought by John Kerry, also a Catholic, when he ran against George W. Bush in 2004. Then-St. Louis Archbishop Ray-

mond Burke said that he would deny Kerry communion because he had voted in favor of legislation supporting abortion.

Once Biden became the presumptive Democratic nominee, the Trump campaign launched a more wide-ranging attack. Accusing Biden of disingenuously playing “the Catholic card,” Trump backers said that, in reality, the former vice president was an enemy of religious liberty. At the same time, the Trump campaign launched Catholics for Trump, a coalition aimed at combating Biden’s appeal to fellow members of his faith. The coalition’s argument was that Biden, through his service in the Obama administration, was complicit in an assault on the freedoms of the Little Sisters, who were then embroiled in nearly a decade of litigation over contraception provisions in the Affordable Care Act.

Tim Huelskamp, the former Tea Party congressman serving on the coalition’s advisory board, told the *Washington Examiner* that, no matter how the Supreme Court decided the Little Sisters case, President Trump can repeatedly whack Biden for it, simply because Biden was Barack Obama’s top adviser when the contraception mandate was instituted.

“He can have Joe Biden and the Democratic Party hating the Little Sisters of the Poor,” Huelskamp said of Trump. “That is just not a good position to be in for the Democratic Party.”

But the truth of Biden’s position on the Little Sisters is murkier. Until the Supreme Court decided that the nuns were free from the imposition of the mandate, which required that the group pay for employees’ contraception in its insurance plans, Biden had never publicly commented on the case.

In private, he had opposed it. In 2012, Biden, along with then-White House chief of staff Bill Daley (also Catholic), attempted to block the inclusion of the mandate in the Affordable Care Act, fearing it would hurt Obama’s electoral chances in the Upper Midwest. They were overruled by then-Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, who felt it was an important women’s issue. The final mandate included narrow exceptions for churches. It was a precursor of the fight Biden is in eight years later, only this time, the buck stops with him.

How Biden handled losing that inter-

nal battle is also instructive. Biden campaigned as if the exceptions were wider than they actually were. In an October 2012 debate with vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan, Biden said that most Catholic institutions were protected.

“With regard to the assault on the Catholic Church, let me make it absolutely clear: No religious institution, Catholic or otherwise — including Catholic Social Services, Georgetown Hospital, Mercy, any hospital — none has to either refer contraception, none has to pay for contraception, none has to be a vehicle to get contraception in any insurance policy they provide,” Biden said. “That is a fact.”

This was, strictly speaking, not a fact — and Ryan pointed that out in his response.

“If they agree with you, why would they keep suing you?” he asked in reference to a growing number of religious liberty cases against the Obama administration, which would soon come to include that of the Little Sisters.

Biden didn’t have an effective response. And when he finally did speak publicly on the issue, the day of the Supreme Court’s decision, circumstances had once again changed, just as they had with the Hyde Amendment. Now, Biden faced a Republican aggressively pursuing religious liberty causes and a Democratic Party openly hostile to them.

The Little Sisters decision was a tinderbox the White House was quick to set aflame. In a statement released shortly after the court’s decision, press secretary Kayleigh McEnany lambasted the “overly rigid and misguided efforts” of the

“Absent from any religious appeals coming out of the Biden camp are policies pitched specifically to religious people. Biden does not talk about religious liberty — except when he expresses opposition to whatever iteration of it is in the news.”



Biden checks off the Pope Francis box at the Vatican, April 29, 2016.

Obama administration in instituting the mandate. She also praised the Trump administration for striving “to lift burdens on religious exercise” for people of every religion “since Day One,” via executive orders and court appointments. Unlike the previous administration, we’ve had the “courage of our convictions,” she added, to extend protections to all classes of society.

Democratic denunciations of the court’s protections poured in throughout the day, with the usual criticisms of the conservative-dominated court for not taking a broader view of women’s issues. Biden didn’t release a statement until after 11 p.m. And when he did, it focused not so much on the case at hand, but on preserving the “Obama-Biden” legacy and the rehabilitation of the much-maligned Affordable Care Act.

The statement was fuel for the Trump campaign, which re-upped its efforts to paint Biden as a nun-hater. In early August, Vice President Mike Pence drew huge cheers from a crowd in Florida when he laid into his predecessor for his position on the Little Sisters. Pence also threw in a gibe about the Hyde Amendment, just for good measure.

The Biden campaign responded by launching “Believers for Biden,” a counter-coalition aimed at appealing to voters’ personal faith. During its launch event, Biden surrogates described the former vice president as a pastoral figure and a prayerful man whose leadership will bring about “reconciliation in our nation.”

Absent, however, from any religious appeals coming out of the Biden camp are policies pitched specifically to reli-

gious people. Biden does not talk about religious liberty — except when he expresses opposition to whatever iteration of it is in the news. He does not harp on the recent rash of Catholic church burnings, despite calls for him to do so. And on abortion, the issue that most motivates Catholics to vote, he all but pushes them to Trump.

“If someone is a single-issue voter on abortion and they still think Republicans are better than Democrats on the issue, that’s probably not someone we’re going to get,” Doug Pagitt, founder of the Biden-friendly Vote Common Good group, told *Politico*.

Failure to pass the abortion litmus test will likely doom Biden’s attempts to reach practicing, as opposed to self-identified, Catholics, or any people who vote based on their faith, said Frank Pavone, an activist priest who has worked with every Republican presidential candidate since George W. Bush. Pavone, who until recently served in both the anti-abortion and Catholic wings of the Trump campaign, told the *Washington Examiner* that, in his experience, too many faith-based voters are mistrustful of a candidate who professes faith but then supports policies contrary to its teachings.

“You can take religion and use it as a cover for anything,” Pavone said. “But belief has to be rooted in more than just Bible verses. People want to know whether what you’re advocating for helps or hurts people. And abortion hurts people.” ★

Nicholas Rowan is a staff writer at the Washington Examiner.

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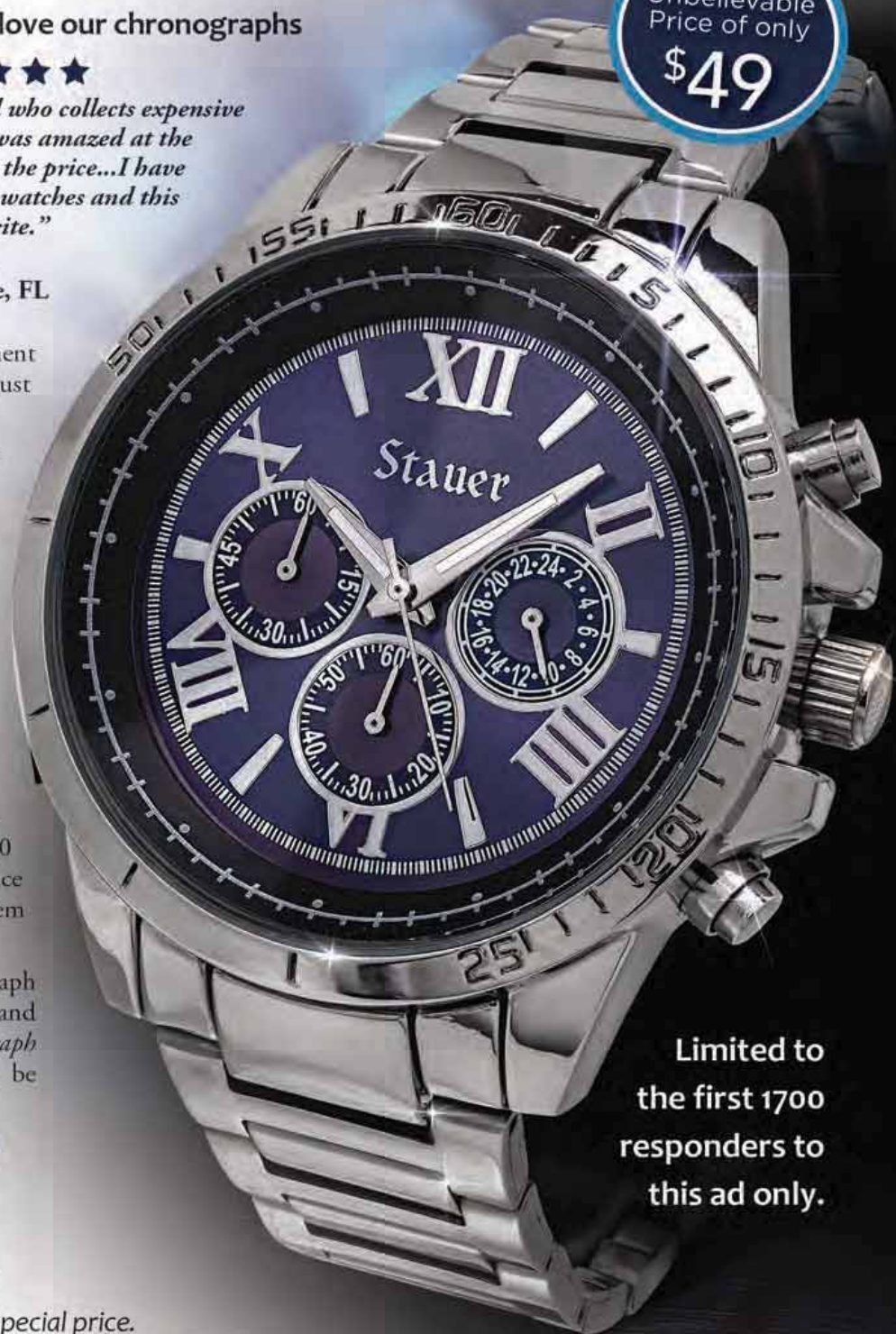
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Joe Biden's World

What the Democratic nominee's foreign policy would look like

By Damir Marusic

It's hard to pin down the shape of a future administration's foreign policy, especially so when the administration is still in the late larval stages, as Joe Biden's currently is. Still, a picture is emerging: We're aware of the core views of the aspiring commander in chief, hear the tenor of the rhetoric emerging from among his chief advisers, and know this group's judgment on the legacy of the administration it hopes to replace.

One challenge to the clarity of that picture is that Biden himself has been scattershot on foreign policy over a lengthy career in government: Biden served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for more than a quarter-century until he became Barack Obama's vice president in 2009. Without cherry-picking contradictions from a foreign policy record that spans nearly five decades of government service, it's impossible not to notice that Biden has pivoted frequently and seems to lack core convictions beyond what has agitated him most recently.

Biden was hawkish on Bosnia after a trip there in 1993, co-sponsoring a bill that ultimately forced President Bill Clinton to take action in 1995 to stem



the bloodshed of the Yugoslav Wars. And he supported Clinton's bombing of Serbia during the Kosovo war in 1999 that helped give birth to the Albanian-majority nation. But he was skittish on George H.W. Bush's intervention in Iraq, while supporting George W. Bush's decision to invade a bit more than a decade lat-

er. By 2006, Biden had properly soured on that decision and was advocating an ill-conceived "Bosnia plan" for Iraq, a kind of federalist soft partition along ethnic lines.

He was arguing, like most Democratic contenders for the presidency in 2008, that Afghanistan was the good and win-

nable war, before he turned on it, too, as Obama's vice president. This clearly made him some enemies in the Obama administration, many of whom are still sniping at him today. Some never forgave his early naivete. "I wish I could say Biden was a student of history and understood how problematic nation-building would be in Afghanistan," an unidentified former top Obama Pentagon official told the *Washington Post* earlier this year. "That's not Biden. He has gut instincts." Others, such as the late Richard Holbrooke, were dismayed by Biden's apparent callousness — especially when contrasted with his interventionist instincts in Bosnia. There's a gripping exchange recorded in Holbrooke's diaries that's worth quoting at length:

When I mentioned the women's issue, Biden erupted. Almost rising from his chair, he said, "I am not sending my boy back there to risk his life on behalf of women's rights, it just won't work, that's not what they're there for." [...] He said it ain't going to happen, he said I don't understand politics, he said we're facing a debacle politically, he said we're going to lose the presidency in 2012 if unemployment remains high, and Afghanistan was the other issue that could pull us down and we have to be on our way out, that we had to do what we did in Vietnam. This shocked me and I commented immediately that I thought we had a certain obligation to the people who had trusted us. He said, "Fuck that, we don't have to worry about that. We did it in Vietnam, Nixon and Kissinger got away with it."

What's striking is not the substance of Biden's foreign policy stances, but rather that they are so often grounded in a keen sense of what the public will bear.

“With the possible exceptions of Richard Nixon and Dwight Eisenhower, presidents rarely take office with a fully formed vision of the world.”



Expect a robust attempt to target offshore finance and tax havens, as well as a focus on reining in currency manipulation.

In 1995, Americans had become fed up with seeing bloody body parts beamed into their living rooms from massacres in Sarajevo. By 2011, they had had enough of body bags coming back from Bagram Air Base. Though often fêted among Democrats as a seasoned foreign policy hand, he is perhaps more accurately described as someone who has been guided by a horse sense of voters' wavering commitments. This is an admirable talent for a politician in a representative democracy, but not the mark of a strategic visionary or a bold leader.

With the possible exceptions of Richard Nixon and Dwight Eisenhower, presidents rarely take office with a fully formed vision of the world. This is not necessarily a mark against them, but their choice of advisers therefore matters a lot. As it currently stands, the apparatus churning out policy papers remains massive and opaque to the outside world, though top advisers such as Jake Sullivan, Antony Blinken, and Ely Ratner have been slowly filling in the broad outlines (set out in a boilerplate article in *Foreign Affairs* earlier this year) of what a Biden foreign policy will look like.

One heartening aspect of the Biden team's approach is how heavily it is refracted through what it sees as the overwhelming challenge posed by a rising China. Anyone worried that the Bidenites were unserious about Beijing can rest assured: That is not the case. Still, the focus on China is of a very different quality than that of the Trump administration. Latching on to the inherent ambiguities of the term "strategic competition" cited in the 2017 National Security Strategy as a cornerstone of the emerging world

order, Biden's team seems intent on reshaping how the term is used. Whereas President Trump's people broadly see competition as a zero-sum contest, the Bidenites correctly note that the kind of "victory" that greeted the United States and its allies with the collapse of the Soviet Union is unlikely to occur. Competition, therefore, means building and maintaining an edge over China in order to ensure that the unavoidable coexistence overall tilts in our favor.

This redefinition of competition has implications in various, disparate arenas. In defense spending, for example, it's out with (expensive) carriers and in with (cheaper) standoff weaponry. The Bidenites believe that overwhelming American military dominance in the Indo-Pacific is now out of reach. But while Chinese development of missile and drone technology may be neutralizing America's historic naval advantage, Biden's team reasons that investing in similar asymmetric means could deter China's adventurism in its own backyard.

The money thus saved from being squandered on pricy military "platforms" could be redirected to various R&D efforts — another top priority of a Biden administration. Clean energy, biotech, and artificial intelligence are singled out as areas in which Chinese investments need to be met or exceeded. The rationale here extends beyond military applications (though those remain important). It represents a bet that an industrial policy informed by national security concerns could spawn unimagined industries and opportunities for growth further down the line, not unlike how DARPA research during the Cold War helped seed the information revolution decades later.

Trade, too, comes in for a rethink. Those with Biden's ear stress that alliances must continue to be bolstered by robust and mutually beneficial commercial relations, but this work won't be guided by the assumption that all trade is by definition mutually beneficial. Expect, therefore, a robust attempt to target offshore finance and tax havens, as well as a focus on reining in currency manipulation. By setting forth commitments to more fair and transparent trade relationships, Biden's team thinks it can bring along American workers battered by globalization, as well as allies traumatized by Trump's neo-mercantilism.

There are a lot of decent ideas kicking around Bidenworld, and some of the

proposals may even work as envisioned. That said, when taken as a whole, the vision is suffused with a kind of optimism that should give us pause. Position papers tend toward the optimistic, as they must offer a plausible way forward. And optimism, it has been said, is a force multiplier: Better to be motivated by a can-do attitude than to waste time admiring problems. But the emergent Biden administration worldview seems to be predicated on the idea that all sorts of positive-sum solutions are within reach, and that the only reason they have not been realized has been for lack of trying.

Biden's team is in part overinternalizing the lessons learned from watching the Trump administration frequently flail about. Trump's failures stem from his almost cartoonish insistence on unprincipled transactionalism and on a dumbed-down version of realpolitik, and a correction is certainly in order. Alas, overcorrection — doubling down on diplomacy as an end in itself — unfortunately seems to be in the cards. For many Democrats, diplomacy is too frequently seen as the process by which

rational actors meet to deliberate in order to get to a win-win. A case in point is the JCPOA, also known as the Iran nuclear deal, which Democrats under Biden stand ready to resuscitate. Though Trump's bunglingly aggressive approach has met little success, Biden's surrogates continue to brush off criticism that the deal itself did nothing to deter Iran's ambitions at regional hegemony, with all the destabilizing implications that implies. Missing is the understanding that deals between adversarial countries are not the bedrock upon which lasting order is built, but rather just a temporary codification of a mutually accepted assessment of the balance of power — and each side's willingness to use it.

This attitude is on prominent display in the Biden team's hopes for tackling climate change. While it's heartening to see that some inside a possible Biden administration see competition for technological solutions as a more promising way forward, the widespread enthusiasm for multilateralism, coupled with the fact that fighting climate change is put forth as a first-order challenge, could end up

shaping approaches to most other questions. Look no further than Europe's toothless approach to Beijing to see how this plays out in practice. If reversing climate change requires cooperation with China, and competition with China is judged to be a struggle that is defined as perpetual and in some sense “unwinnable,” it's easy to see how even the most hawkish Asia strategists in the Biden administration could be undercut.

As Helmuth von Moltke wrote in his 1871 treatise on strategy, no plan survives first contact with the enemy. That's the proper spirit in which one should view any campaign's ambitious proposals for tackling a messy and unpredictable world. Policy papers and strategic planning documents at their best help organize thinking within a sprawling and unwieldy bureaucracy. But despite people's best efforts, forcing events have a way of reordering priorities. Biden's long record on foreign affairs attests to that. ★

Damir Marusic is executive editor at the American Interest and senior nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council.

THEN AND NOW

Wine windows

Across the globe, the coronavirus and accompanying lockdowns have forced businesses to adapt in order to keep their doors open. And some resourceful business owners in Italy have instead looked to the past.

As reported by the *New York Post* earlier this month, medieval “wine windows” are reopening across Tuscany, “reviving [an] Italian plague tradition.” The “wine windows,” or buchette del vino, are small apertures, around a foot tall and 8 inches wide, built into the walls of shops, businesses, and homes that once belonged to Renaissance gentry, who would use them to sell wine. According to the Buchette del Vino Associazione Culturale (Wine Window Association), current-day Florentines have begun to do the same, “dispens[ing] glasses of wine, cups of coffee, drinks, sandwiches and ice cream — all germ-free, contactless!”

And while it's true that the buchette del vino were used during a second bout

of bubonic plague, several hundred years after the major outbreak of the Black Death known as the Italian Plague of 1629-1631, the original motivation behind them was profit, not contamination mitigation. As Lisa Harvey pointed out last year in *Atlas Obscura*, wealthy Florentine families sold wine from their palaces to get around distribution fees and taxes. In a sop to landowning local nobles, on Feb. 28, 1599, Cosimo I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, issued a declaration allowing wealthy families to sell the wine they produced directly from their residences, rather than via merchants, taverns, and inns.

“Many wealthier Florentines (including the Medici) not only had homes inside the city walls, but also vineyards in the countryside,” she explained. The windows developed as a way for such families to utilize the direct-to-buyer edict, and thus skip out on the accompanying taxes, without having to open their homes to the hoi polloi. Instead, passersby could simply knock on the door of the buchette del vino, where “a well-respected, well-paid servant, called a *cantiniere* and trained in properly

preserving wine, stood on the other side. The cantiniere would open the little door, take the customer's empty straw-bottomed flask and their payment, refill the bottle down in the *cantina* (wine cellar), and hand it back out to the customer on the street.”

According to writings of contemporary scholar Francesco Rondinelli (1589-1665), additional sanitation measures were instituted during the plague years, including prohibiting the exchange of empty flasks and vinegar disinfection of all collected coins. Yet, as Robbin Gheesling noted for *The Florentine* magazine, it wasn't until Grand Duke Cosimo III's Bando Granducale of Oct. 2, 1749 (an official notice about Tuscan wines), “that the concept of *botteghe a sportello* — shop windows set up in homes — was solidified, significantly weakening the power of the wine guild.”

An interactive map for the Wine Window Association currently lists 149 active and inactive wine windows inside Florence alone, with yet more located throughout the surrounding countryside.

—By J. Grant Addison

The Obama Recovery, Version 2.0

Biden will seek to placate his left flank while accepting low growth as the 'new' new normal

By Joseph Simonson

When trying to predict Joe Biden's economic agenda, one must ask: Which Joe Biden are we talking about? If it's the Biden who, in the primary, mocked young Bernie Sanders supporters as merely children who walk around with their heads down saying "Woe is me," then a Biden presidency looks much like an extension of the Obama years. The operating logic of Obamaism toward younger radicals is simple: You'll grow up, as we did.

But a new Biden has emerged, one who's promised "the most progressive administration since FDR" and has no problem cynically using the economic destruction brought on by the coronavirus and state lockdowns as an opportunity to push a radical expansion of the welfare state. Biden has become rather impressionable for a 77-year-old. It's



hard to say whether this pivot is a product of self-convincing — that is, this period of history calls for an unabashedly left-wing president — or out of fear and desperation that he's insufficiently exciting to garner enough youth turnout to defeat President Trump in November.

When speaking to both liberals and leftists who work in policy about what a Biden presidency may look like, a collective shrug emerges. "It's hard to say."

"There's some good and some bad." Much of this is out of a general acknowledgment that nobody knows who will really be making policy, and that he's never spent much time concerned about economics to begin with. Wonks on the Left will excitedly tell you about an Elizabeth Warren or Sanders adviser who is behind Biden's climate change plan or point to myriad left-wing think tanks whose functional purpose is to staff the next Democratic administration. For the most passionate and orthodox leftists, the standard caveats apply: Biden's not a self-proclaimed socialist, he doesn't believe wage labor is an unfortunate and replaceable consequence of modernity, and his industrial policy doesn't revolve around making America the leading exporter of guillotines.

Nor is Biden's long career much help. His two self-proclaimed greatest achievements during his time in the Senate had nothing to do with the economic wellbeing of Americans; Biden only

Most plans released by a presidential candidate are typically aspirational, and in Biden's case relatively scarce compared to his former competitors Sanders or Warren.



really became a household name after earning a position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Otherwise, even during the Democratic primary, he typically championed his work on passing the Violence Against Women's Act and ensuring an assault weapons ban was included in the 1994 crime bill. Biden initially generated enthusiasm among Democratic voters during his first disastrous presidential run in 1988 mostly due to his relative youth and his role in the Robert Bork Supreme Court confirmation hearings. His second disastrous run in 2008 can be best remembered by his quixotic plan to formally break up Iraq into ethnic enclaves.

Most plans released by a presidential candidate are typically aspirational, and in Biden's case relatively scarce compared to his former competitors Sanders or Warren. At the very least, these policy proposals typically serve as a gauge of a future president's priorities. For both Sanders and Warren, that meant

bleeding billionaires to provide "free" healthcare to everyone. In the primary, Biden's time out of office served as an asset: There were no recent bills he had to cosponsor to feign solidarity with the most left-wing members of his party, nor has he had to vote on a piece of legislation in roughly 12 years. Attacks on his Senate record seemed archaic and irrelevant. Attacks on his time as vice president meant undermining the legacy of Barack Obama, a certain death sentence in a Democratic primary.

Biden is fond of talking about his former boss, and Democrats adore crediting the generally strong economy under Trump's first three years in office with the policies of his predecessor. Like Obama, a President Biden could enter office inheriting a GDP contraction and catastrophic unemployment rate not seen since the Great Depression. The subsequent recovery from the 2009 crash, or lack thereof, is instructive for how Biden and his advisors/surrogates

will likely set expectations for the general public.

In the wake of the Great Recession, left-leaning economists and think tankers explained the anemic economic growth throughout the Obama years as the "new normal." Stagnation would define the next decade (at least), they claimed, barring any sort of transformational technological innovation to radically improve productivity. Some economists and public intellectuals even surmised that humanity may have simply reached a plateau there as well. Larry Summers, the former treasury secretary who now serves as an adviser to Biden, hypothesized that the United States was in danger of a decades-long period of essentially no GDP expansion unless the economy was radically restructured. In 2011, economist Paul Krugman argued the country was doomed to a "Japan-style era of high unemployment and low growth."

Following Trump's election in 2016,

however, the economy saw near-3% annual GDP growth and one of the tightest labor markets in recent history. Suddenly the success of the U.S. economy was an obvious payoff from eight years of Obama's policies. Crediting Trump for rising wages and high labor participation would be a grave error, these same individuals said. The so-called "new normal" didn't seem so bad after all.

Despite the recent calls from members of the Left, such as Rep. Ilhan Omar, to "dismantle" the country's "systems of oppression," Biden will be tasked with putting Americans back to work and somehow salvaging the remains of the country's businesses following a record number of bankruptcies. Nothing in Biden's proposed plans so far suggest he will be "dismantling" anything, but instead reverting to the economic policies of the Obama era.

Much of this is attributable to a simple lack of imagination. The liberal-to-left-wing tool kit follows a simple formula of cash transfers to the poor funded by the wealthy, who often work in industries, namely finance and tech, benefiting from some form of rent seeking or regulatory capture. It's no coincidence that the wealthy, who can afford a modest increase in income and capital gains taxes, have no problem donating to Democrats every election cycle while your average small businessman groans at the prospect of a new regulatory regime. As long as top-line growth remains consistent, no matter how me-

diocre it may be, Democrats are content with increasing welfare to subsidize the incomes of much of the country in place of higher wages that a healthy economy would normally provide.

Understanding the voting base of the Democratic Party is important here as well. The new government subsidies at the top of the Democratic agenda will likely target two struggling groups in particular: blacks and the professional middle class. For the former, Democrats in Congress will try to pass more funding for government-backed small-business loans and housing vouchers for minorities and some form of free college and childcare for urban whites. None of these policies actually addresses the underlying issues facing either demographic — housing remaining overpriced in many cities or the two-income trap leading many young professionals to believe that they're working more for less pay — but these new handouts will at least create the impression that Democrats feel their pain. Just as Obamacare did nothing to curb the rise in costs or the fundamental market inefficiencies in healthcare, these programs will mask the underlying causes of economic distress while also making them politically impossible to repeal.

For the reform-minded conservative, there are a handful of encouraging signs from Biden. Most notably, his \$700 billion "buy American" program is a serious recognition that a new and comprehensive domestic industrial policy to compete with China will require significant government investment for re-shoring key manufacturing supply chains. Although the price tag may make fiscal conservatives queasy, there is good reason to believe America's lack of ability to compete in key technological sectors constitutes not just an economic crisis but one of national security. The release of the plan was a transparent effort to beat Trump at his own game — economic nationalism — so the question of whether Biden remains sincere about stimulating domestic manufacturing remains open.

This is, after all, the same man who, in one of his first speeches on the campaign trail, downplayed the threat of China and said "they're not in competition for us." Earlier this month, Biden's campaign had to walk back his pledge to eliminate all of Trump's tariffs against China. Biden's explanation for a unilateral surrender in the current trade war

was that tariffs are the "wrong way" to curb China's growing economic dominance. True or not, Biden consistently implies that his positive relationship with Xi Jinping can help reduce tensions between the two countries and any other disputes can be handled through international institutions such as the World Trade Organization. China, to paraphrase Biden, is a potential partner, not the threat to the West xenophobic Republicans make it out to be.

Democrats will likely only have the opportunity to pass three-to-four pieces of major legislation before the 2022 midterms. Given Biden's self-confidence in his ability to smooth things over with world leaders, it's safe to assume any bill that confronts China's aggression will take a backseat to things that more readily play to his party's base. The political capital necessary to pass a \$700 billion domestic spending package could easily be spent elsewhere, such as dramatically expanding voting rights, a hyper-liberal Supreme Court Justice, or handing citizenship to millions of illegal aliens.

Should Democrats control both chambers of Congress and the presidency come January 2021, the temptation to nuke the filibuster and push through every item on Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's wish list will be strong. To be sure, Biden will need a few symbolic and left-wing victories early on in his presidency lest he risk a revolt within the Democratic Party. But choosing *which* victories will be when Biden decides how he wants to define his presidency. The problem with actually governing is that voters know who is responsible for the country's decisions at the end of the day.

As his former boss quickly learned, it's far easier to blame the opposition for the country's economic malaise than bothering to compromise or modify your agenda. Biden, like Obama, will also benefit from a media and academic environment dedicated to defending any slow recovery as a consequence of historical forces or an obstinate Republican Party. Getting the economy back to where it was at the beginning of 2020 will be one of the hardest tasks any president in modern times has faced. The alternative is pressing for Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico statehood or outlawing AR-15s. For Biden, the choice couldn't be more obvious. ★

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Biden's \$700 billion 'buy American' program is a serious recognition that a new and comprehensive domestic industrial policy to compete with China will require significant government investment for re-shoring key manufacturing supply chains.

Meet Your Robot Caretaker

The future of elder care may sound like a sci-fi fantasy, but its benefits are very real

By Starre Vartan

Imagine waking up on your 92nd birthday four or five decades from now: You need help getting from the bed to the bathroom, medication reminders, someone to make your bed up — and it would really help your bum hip if there were someone there to help you stretch it out.

So, you call for Roberta. She's strong enough to help you to the bathroom, and it's not so embarrassing when she cleans you up. She has your medications all organized for you, and you know she's already double-checked them against the database she updates daily. Roberta makes the bed while you take the meds with some juice she's freshly squeezed. As she's helping you get dressed, she reminds you to do that hip-stretching routine.

Roberta does all this with ease, like the well-oiled machine she is. You'd expect nothing less from your robot caretaker.

Of course, a person could also do all of this work, and right now, people do. But humans are expensive, even as the



A resident at a nursing home in Bordeaux, France, greets Zora, a robot that talks, sings, dances, and moves to come into contact with the residents.

job of caring for older people pays poorly. The 2 million home healthcare aides in the United States — 90% are women and over 50% are people of color — make an average of \$12 an hour, a quarter of them live below the federal poverty line, and half rely on public assistance to get by.

Not only are home healthcare aides notoriously low-paid, they perform a dangerous job: Lifting and moving people's bodies to wheelchairs, toilets, and baths is part of the physical work required and results in a "high risk" for injuries, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The intimate nature of the work and needle sticks can lead to disease transmission from elderly patients. It's a tough job with high turnover.

At the same time, the elderly population is expected to double by 2050. "We already have a shortage of home health nurses and aides, and life expectancies keep getting longer," said Dr. Katherine Pannel, a geriatric psychiatrist and the medical director of Senior Life Solutions in Winona, Mississippi. Some kind of in-home care is necessary to keep costs



A resident interacts with a nursing-home robot in Florence, Italy, December 19, 2015.

down — the 14 million Americans who need assistance but live on their own save billions for Medicare and their own pockets compared to those who live in nursing homes. “So, I think robots and artificial intelligence certainly has a role in the future care of geriatric populations,” said Pannel.

You might blanch at the idea of replacing people with robots, but human home healthcare aides have their limitations. Consider that the connection between a patient and his or her carer, like any human relationship, can be fraught for any number of reasons, including plain old personality conflicts. There’s also the fact that patients will care about the caregiver, which sounds nice but can also mean that reticent patients don’t ask for what they need, which can be stressful. In a survey of elderly Japanese, one of the reasons cited for preferring a robot carer was that “not having to worry about a robot’s welfare was a plus.”

And, of course, “to err is human.” People make mistakes, get sick, have

bad days, or have to care for their own children or parents and can’t make it into work sometimes, leaving the vulnerable elderly to fend for themselves. And even worse, elder abuse is not uncommon (between 7%-10% of the elderly are abused by family or carers).

If and when this change takes place, there are reasons to view it not as part of a sci-fi dystopia but as an improvement in societal well-being.

“**If robots make a mistake or do something that causes pain, it’s simple to track and fix, without the guilt and shame that causes humans to cover problems up.**”

Unlike humans, robots can be programmed to be consistent and reliable. They can respond at any time of day or night, while human caretakers are usually on duty only during specific times. While their charges sleep, a robot can do household chores. Robots won’t forget to help with exercises, dispense medicine, or do needed household tasks on time, reliably.

If robots make a mistake or do something that causes pain, it’s simple to track and fix, without the guilt and shame that causes humans to cover problems up. And they don’t hold grudges or take out feelings on their charges. Even the best of humans can get frustrated and angry with an older person who may be neurologically challenged or in pain and lashing out. A robot won’t have feelings to hurt.

Then there is the very intimate work that can be awkward for both. Robots don’t get embarrassed, and honestly, who would you rather have give you a bath — a person you barely know or a robot that has been programmed to know how much soap you like?

“Robots could do things like check vital signs: blood pressure, blood sugar, and pulse. Patients get confused by when to take medications, and that can be deadly — and it makes them anxious. A lot of home health aid work, that is all they are doing — filling pillboxes, drawing up insulin, and household tasks,” said Pannel.

She says robots handling these tasks would free humans to do other, more important work, the kind only humans can do: “How awesome would it be for the home healthcare nurse to play games, discuss TV shows, take them outside for fresh air, take them to get their hair done, instead of mundane tasks?”

This kind of human connection is something that the isolated elderly, who don’t have family or social support, desperately need. “Some of my patients only have social interaction during doctor’s appointments, so increasing that human interaction time is really important,” said Pannel. “We don’t want robots replacing that.”

For those elderly people who do live with a partner or other family, a robot could similarly free up time and reduce stress, becoming a part of the family that allows the “sandwich generation” of working parents who have both children and elderly parents at home more time to engage in enriching, enjoyable activities with children and grandparents.

In some ways, the future is now. The first generation of consumer-facing, caretaking robots is already here, or is being tested. There’s Mobiserv in Europe; GiraffPlus in Sweden; Stevie, designed in Ireland; and Zora in France. In Japan, where 80% of the population has a positive view of robots for elder care, a government-backed project assisted “98 manufacturers to test nursing-care robotic devices ... 15 of which have been developed into commercial products.” And of course, Paro, the plush comfort robot “seal,” is already popular in Japan, as well as North America and Europe.

And there’s Temi, a robot that was going to be rolled out as part of a new luxury senior living center in Manhattan. When the coronavirus hit, these robots were immediately utilized at the company’s suburban locations, according to Shane Herlet, CEO of Maplewood Senior Living. The company deployed the Temis to video chat with families, doctors, and the internal teams, deliver packages, and pick up items left behind in the dining room. Temis are even learning jokes. “While the robots ... normalize daily life



A woman in Frankfurt, Germany, checks out a humanoid robot named ‘Pepper’ that is being developed by nearby university students, November 28, 2018.

with strict social distancing and social isolation rules, the real benefit that we were hoping for and are seeing is their ability to lift the spirits of the residents. We see our residents dance to the music Temi plays, laugh along with its jokes, and utilize the video chat function to see family members that are temporarily not able to visit,” said Herlet.

These robots aren’t doing chores yet; all of the above devices are, in some way, social. Paro and Zora are mostly pet replacements that, due to their high costs, are usually shared by a nursing home community. Paro is especially calming to dementia patients, effectively replacing anxiety medications in some cases. Unlike a real animal, Paro can’t be hurt by a confused patient.

GiraffPlus, Mobiserv, and Stevie all combine some social aspects but are

aimed more at reminding and motivating their humans — to eat a snack, drink water, take medications at a certain time. Only one robot prototype can lift and move a human body so far: the RIBA from Japan’s RIKEN-TRI Collaboration Center for Human-Interactive Robot Research. And none cook or do chores.

While it’s still early for more widespread robot-human adoption, studies show that for most people, connections to artificial intelligence or even mechanical objects can happen without even trying (as anyone who has named a car and cried when it was sold will attest). Dr. Elizabeth Broadbent, professor of health psychology at the University of Auckland, has studied human-robot interaction for over 20 years and found that most people became friends with their healthcare robots. “This has happened automatically as people have liked having the robot in the house and found it provided a kind of social presence through talking and moving and blinking lights,” she said.

How much a patient needs to “bond” with his or her robot depends on what it’s needed for, says Tatsuya Nomura, professor in the Faculty of Advanced Science and Technology at Ryukoku University in Japan. He studied these interactions and found that for purely physical tasks such as eating and going to the bathroom, a more mechanical robot that a patient doesn’t have an emotional connection to can be best since that connection can lead to “care receivers’ avoidance of the robots” out of embarrassment. But when

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While it’s still early for more widespread robot-human adoption, studies show that for most people, connections to artificial intelligence or even mechanical objects can happen without even trying.

it comes to social tasks, such as aiding the “management of medicines, emotional connection with robots may encourage the task,” said Nomura.

Integrating a variety of physically capable robotics with artificial intelligence that is more complex than basic companionship or a nagging machine will take time. “We will need about 50 years to develop that,” said Dr. Hirohisa Hirukawa, director of the Robot Innovation Research Center at Japan’s National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology.

Trying to integrate the bulk strength needed to lift another person, intermediate power to pick up a set of sheets from the stack in the linen closet, and delicate precision to comb hair or count out pills is a tall order for a machine. And safety is a serious issue.

A more powerful robot can do more kinds of jobs, so for a long time, the thinking was the stronger, the better. Not so fast, says Chris Atkeson, a professor of robotics in the Human-Computer Interaction Institute at Carnegie Mellon University. The concern isn’t that a robot will suddenly go berserk and act out against humans in some kind of sci-fi nightmare. It’s about patient care: “You don’t want to use a bulldozer to brush your teeth. As you make a robot stronger, they are going to be more and more like a bulldozer — it can lift heavy loads, but it doesn’t have a delicate touch. That’s the laws of physics. You’re either weak with a delicate touch or strong and kind of dangerous.”

After all, “These are fragile people, and we want to be gentle.” Working these challenges out is what puts a fully humanoid robot that can do it all on the long-term plan.

One question on everyone’s mind: What will the robots look like? Broadbent says to expect form to follow function: “You expect a doctor or nurse to tell you to take medications, so a robot that reminds you to take medications needs to look and act like a doctor or nurse. We know that cats can’t talk, and they certainly know nothing about medications, so people won’t take medications from a talking robotic cat. However, if we want a pet for companionship, then we want a robot to look and act like a cute cat or other animal.”

Experts who study the ethics of robotics have found that human-like robots aren’t ideal — they’re much more likely to be rejected than a robot that seems like an animal or just looks like something entirely new. That’s down to the “uncanny valley” aspect of robotics, in which a close-but-not-quite human creeps people out.

“Something like C-3PO from Star Wars has a human-like form but is clearly not human due to his metallic surface. Getting the right mixture of function and form that makes us feel comfortable is definitely important,” said Broadbent.

All but the most basic robots used in healthcare are already equipped with artificial intelligence that can, over time, “learn” the humans they work for. This

will lead to specialization far beyond the physical presentation of the robot. An isolated person who craves company could have a machine that chats or reads. Patients could request funny, intellectual, or quiet robot personalities. Some might focus on keeping a person physically active, while others might challenge their person with games and puzzles to keep cognitive skills up. Personalization will be key to providing good care and building meaningful psychological relationships between people and robots.

As robotics technology and AI advance over the coming decades, researchers say that before we have a fully functional robot caretaker, we’ll see a variety of robots come to market, with specific functions aimed at different needs. “Maybe 90% of robot applications can be covered by simple machines,” said Hirukawa, who points out that mobility, which can keep seniors independent for years longer, is the most important.

For example, Hirukawa, who’s worked on healthcare robots for over 30 years, thinks a “power suit” could solve the mobility issues that so many older people have. The suit is like an exoskeleton that can enable the wearer to move from sit to stand and to walk more easily. “The senior person can even sleep while wearing some of these power suits, so if they wake up in the night, they can get up and go to the toilet by themselves,” he said. This device is pretty simple, compared to a humanoid robot — it only has two motors and a sensor to sense the intention of the user — and it can learn and refine that feedback over time.

Atkeson agrees with the idea of taking the robotics out of the robot. “Let’s alter the home and roboticize the whole environment to help with the job [of elderly caretaking]. It’s not like we don’t do that now. In taking care of my own mother, we bought walkers and special pillows. Let’s put sensors in those to make them smart.” He envisions pillows that could help people off the couch and beds that work like Barcaloungers.

“We think we want a walking Swiss Army knife, but there’s no need to package everything we need in one robot,” said Atkeson. “Let’s take it apart and summon up the right tool to do whatever job needs to be done.” ★

Starre Vartan is an independent science journalist and dog-runner currently living on an island in Puget Sound near Seattle.



A robot leads an exercise class for seniors at a nursing home in Paris, France, January 31, 2019.

The Myth of the 'Rigged' Senate

Democrats' quest for unchecked government is based on a false premise and misunderstands our political design

By Robert Showah

Since 1981, Democrats have earned, on average, longer and larger majorities in the Senate. For the 50 years before 1981, Senate Republicans were in the majority for a total of four years. Conversely, Democrats are the only party to twice earn filibuster-proof supermajorities since Senate rules were revised in 1975. Yet despite Democrats controlling the chamber only six years ago, media figures and academics keep saying Republicans have a "structural advantage" and that the Senate is "rigged." This is patently untrue, and Democrats should not use frustration with momentary politics to undermine the integrity of American democratic institutions.

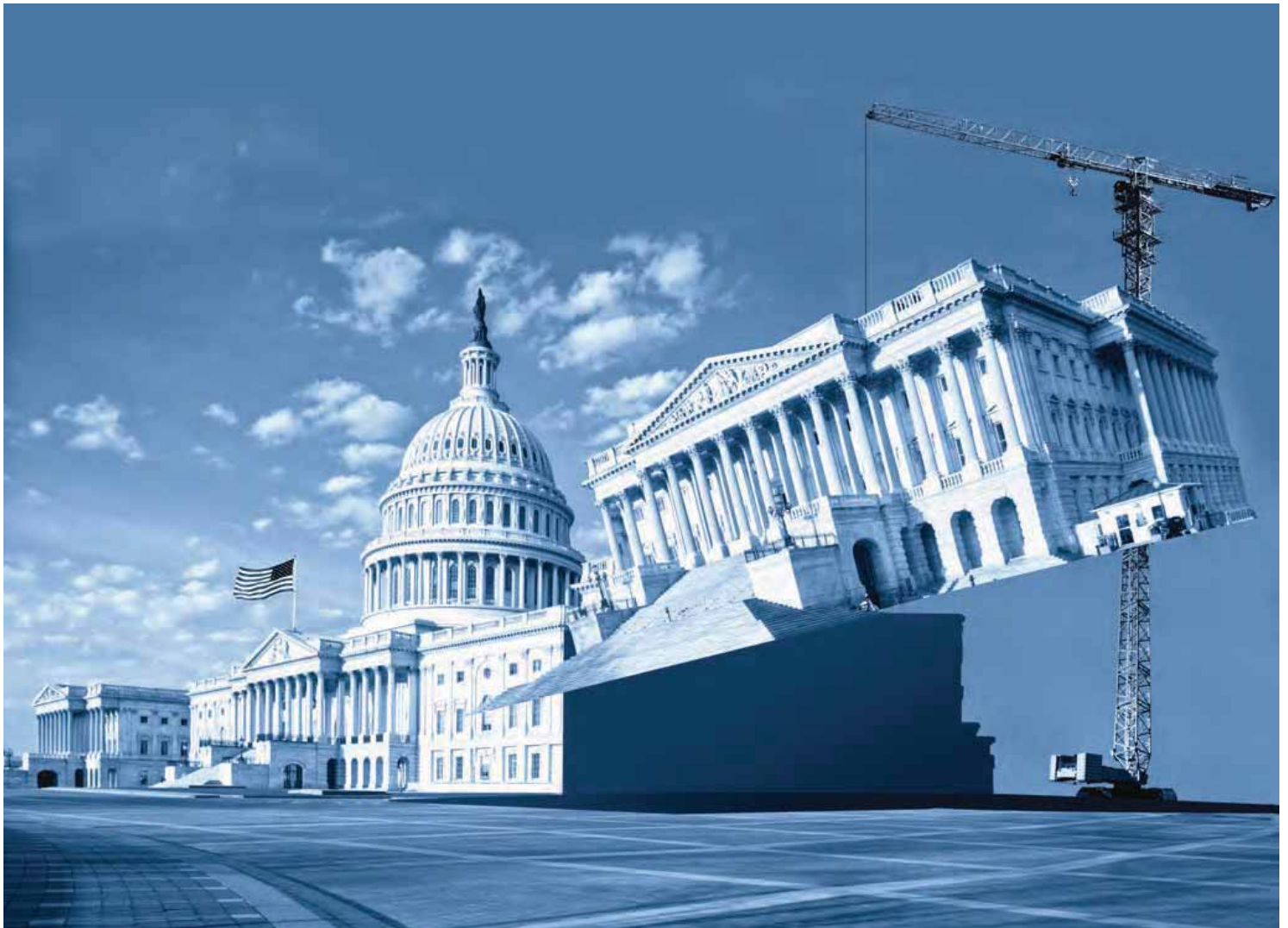
The offensive against the Senate follows a broader trend within a certain corner of national media in which frequently benign and nonpartisan aspects

of American life are being reframed as pernicious threats to democracy. Vox's Ezra Klein argues that what he sees as a distinct period of partisan polarization means that Democrats have to compete for the center in a way Republicans do not. *New York Times* reporter Emily Badger offered a similar narrative, citing urbanization and attributing Democrats' current minority status in the Senate to ostensibly more Democratic voters concentrated in fewer urbanized states, resulting in less legwork for Republicans to cobble together a majority.

There are several flaws with this premise. First, the claims that Republicans aren't competing for the center or for Democratic-leaning swing votes don't hold up. Senate Republicans owe their current majority to having won significant percentages of the Democratic vote in competitive states, such as Maine, and by contesting and winning in states that have more frequently elected Democrats to the Senate over the last 26

years, such as North Dakota. To miss this fact is a result of a second flaw, which is the tendency of political journalists and pundits overinvested in presidential and federal politics to incongruently superimpose national public opinion and other national-based metrics onto the

“Senate Democrats stacked the deck against themselves by having not remained broadly competitive over the last decade in less urban states where they once reliably held seats.”



states. This is often done with the implication that any particular state or constituency that does not conform to an interpretation of national public opinion is irreversibly undermining democracy.

Using national data, particularly demographics, as a proxy for understanding state dynamics does not accurately portray states or their political realities. One example is the excessive weight placed on how a state or constituency voted in a recent presidential election as a determining factor in how that state or constituency is characterized for national audiences. While the candidates who states elect for president and Senate more frequently align along partisan lines, in an ever-changing, consequential number of states, winning a state's "center" or its persuadable partisans is especially crucial. Senate Democrats stacked the deck against themselves by having not remained broadly competitive over the last decade in less urban states where they once reliably held seats.

But the greater, overarching flaw with the idea that the Senate is "rigged"

against the Democrats and democracy is a fundamental misunderstanding about our system of government itself. The United States is both a democratic republic and a federation of states; divided power is America's North Star. Neither democracy nor republicanism are virtues — they're mechanisms for checking power. The "democratic" element checks the elected. The "republic" checks the people.

As such, the Senate is "rigged" against broadly disruptive, impulsive, legally binding ideas, not political parties. Checking those ideas requires impeding, not paralyzing, central power. One of several impediments to central power is the grant of equal suffrage to the states in the Senate guaranteed in Article V of the Constitution. Each state, regardless of size or population, gets two senators.

Critics assert that equal suffrage, and therefore the Senate as a whole, is distinctly undemocratic because seats aren't allocated by population or earned in proportion to a hypothetical accumulation of votes. In a way, this is true, as

the Senate is meant by design to be the republican check on the democratically sensitive House of Representatives. But equal state suffrage could also be viewed as a feature that makes America more democratic, as it represents government via the consent of multiple, pluralistic majorities rather than a singular national majority.

By constraining central authority, the pluralistic model secures opportunities for recourse and democratic participation across a multiculture of 50 states and 90,000 municipalities. This is especially important when the federal government fails to act or acts to fail, as we've seen during the coronavirus pandemic. Conversely, the singular model eliminates avenues for recourse and confines voters to outsourcing the work of self-governance, coalition-building, and community care-taking to fewer people in higher places. Several democracies — Mexico, Kenya, Germany, Japan, Switzerland, Australia, and France — all purposefully incorporate some form or another of equal and nonproportional



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structures as a means to impede uniformity across multicultures and regions.

One could banter over beers as to whether the founders “got it right.” They disagreed over the extent to which central power and its excesses ought to be impeded in the wake of the tyranny, monarchical or otherwise, that has defined much of human history. James Madison, who vehemently opposed equal suffrage for the states in the Senate, touted a competing Virginia Plan granting states proportional representation in the Senate. Yet Madison ultimately defended equal suffrage after its passage, acknowledging its benefits in *Federalist No. 62*: “Larger States will always be able, by their power over the supplies, to defeat unreasonable exertions of this prerogative of the lesser States, and as the faculty and excess of law-making seem to be the diseases to which our governments are most liable, it is not impossible that this [equal suffrage in the Senate] may be more convenient in practice than it appears to many in contemplation.”

While Californians and Wyomingites are each represented by two senators despite their disparate populations, Californians run the fifth-largest economy in the world, are among the wealthiest Americans, and hold 53 seats in the U.S. House to Wyoming’s one seat. Rather than emboldening powerful states, Madison prompts the question of why it ought to be presumed that a state with ample “supplies” to govern itself be granted more than equal legally binding influence in both chambers over states more vulnerable to the abuse of central power.

For the Senate’s critics, multi-majoritarianism does not register. The *Atlantic* has run multiple takes against the Senate in the past few years, one calling for its abolition and another featuring a dubious, hair-brained plot to bypass the Constitution and pack the Senate. Other critics have reflexively lunged for identitarianism to discredit the body. At the *New York Times*, columnist David Leonhardt called the Senate “affirmative action for white people,” arguing that the concentration of racial minorities in populous states dilutes their voting power in the Senate. As a remedy, Leonhardt argues for granting statehood to jurisdictions such as Puerto Rico, grotesquely implying that Puerto Ricans can act as representatives for other racial minorities with diverse interests and identities because of their approximate skin tones.

As an implicit dig at equal suffrage

that was picked up by others, including Klein, Norman Ornstein remarked that by 2040, population projections show that 70% of Americans will live in 15 states, meaning as little as 30% of the public will elect some 70 senators. What Ornstein omits is that roughly the same percentage of people have lived in the same percentage of states since 1790.

Vox’s Ian Millhiser observed that a majority of the senators who voted to acquit President Trump on impeachment charges *cumulatively* represent a minority of the national population. This is, of course, a moot point, as U.S. senators are popularly elected to represent their state constituency. It compares to the “Senate popular vote” fabrication that emerged after the 2018 midterm elections. By Millhiser’s own logic, Trump won the “popular vote” in 2016 because he won states that cumulatively comprise a majority of the national population.

Harvard law professor Laurence Tribe tweeted the sumptuous lie that the Senate’s equal suffrage among the states was devised as a “Faustian bargain” between slave states and free states. Rather, the division over equal suffrage was between more populous and less populous states. As the *Washington Examiner*’s Philip Klein has written, proportional representation in the Senate would likely have buttressed a decisive pro-slavery majority and expanded the institution to additional territories, since states with large populations of enslaved people, who were denied the vote and yet still counted in state populations, were also among the most populous.

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None of this is to say that granting statehood to Puerto Rico or electing presidents by popular vote, or even granting larger states modestly greater voting power, has no merit. Rather, it is to refute the suggestion that the exclusion of these ideas makes America’s political system objectively less fair, representative, or democratic. In the United States, the virtues of an entrenched skepticism of authority and securing fair and inclusive elections can and do coexist. And contrary to critics, for the last century, Democrats have been exceptionally skilled at excelling within this system.

Since at least the 1990s, the opposition party to the president has netted more Senate seats in states that had more frequently elected senators of the president’s party for the previous 25 years. That means today, Senate Republicans mostly owe their majority to having flipped nine seats in seven blue states during the Obama presidency. Here, “blue states” are defined as having (re)elected more Democrats to the Senate than Republicans since 1996. Those states are North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, West Virginia, Arkansas, Wisconsin, and Louisiana. Five of those states are among the 13 least urban and were crucial to Democrats earning their 2009 supermajority. Less urban states breaking decisively for Republicans is a new phenomenon in contemporary Senate politics and is one major reason why critics claim the Senate is rigged.

Today, South Dakota and North Dakota are represented by two Republicans in the Senate for the first time since 1986 and 1960, respectively. West Virginians are represented by a Republican senator for the first time since 1956. No party loses seats it held for a half-century because the map is rigged. Parties adapt, or they lose.

Yet, last year, Ronald Brownstein at the *Atlantic* blamed white men in rural states for the Senate’s inaction on a few Democratic pet issues, since rural states with higher proportions of white men are more likely to be represented by senators who are resistant to gun control and climate change legislation. Setting aside that the electorate isn’t a sea of single-issue voters, that senators are exclusively responsive to their constituencies, that each party has safe seats that could be interpreted as obstructions to policy, or that many of the states to which Brownstein alludes have among the lowest gun homicide rates and pro-

duce the lion's share of the country's energy, Brownstein is also wrong on the remaining merits.

One reason is that the drivers of American democracy at the ballot box are women. Since 1996, women have outvoted men in every state and have done so at higher rates in less urban states. Women also outvote men by wider than average margins in states more likely to be represented by Senate Republicans. This is *especially* the case in states with high proportions of white men, such as Wyoming, South Dakota, and Iowa. Today, Democrats and Republicans hold an equal number of seats in states with above-average turnout among white men over age 65.

Senate Republicans have contested the center and won. In states where residents are equally or more likely to affiliate with Republicans, according to Gallup, Senate Democrats hold six seats. In states where residents are equally or more likely to affiliate with Democrats, Senate Republicans hold 11 seats. (Eight of those seats are well within Democrats' grasp of flipping this year.)

Based on exit poll data from the past four Senate elections, candidates average about 8 points in the percentage of the vote earned from voters affiliated with the opposite party. In competitive states — that is, where party affiliation is within a margin of 5 points — at least seven Republican senators have been (re) elected with above-average percentages of the Democratic vote, including Mitch McConnell in Kentucky (17%), the late John McCain in Arizona (16%), Rand Paul in Kentucky (15%), Chuck Grassley in Iowa (18%), Rob Portman in Ohio (18%), Johnny Isakson in Georgia (12%), Marco Rubio in Florida (12%), and Pat Toomey in Pennsylvania (12%). In four of those states, party affiliation is within a margin of 1 point. In Maine, where Democrats outnumber Republicans by 13 points, the now-vulnerable Republican Susan Collins, who is up for reelection again this year, was reelected in 2014 with 39% of the Democratic vote.

Constituencies less likely to vote for recent Republican presidential candidates have contributed to Senate Republican victories. In 2016, Isakson was reelected in Georgia with 18% of the black vote, doubling Trump's 9% share in the state. In 2018, Republican Rick Scott

unseated Democrat Bill Nelson in Florida by one-tenth of 1%, or 10,000 votes out of 8.1 million cast. Scott did it with 45% of the Latino vote, to Trump's 35% in the state.

Vox's Klein writes that what he sees as "distortions" in institutions such as the Senate are why Republicans are in power and reasons that if proportional representation, for example, were passed,



Madison: From staunchly opposed to approving.

this would force Republicans to moderate. But Senate Republicans winning in states that more frequently elected Democrats isn't a distortion; it's reality. It also isn't clear that emboldening a kind of nationalization of American politics would moderate a Republican Party that is ostensibly moving in a more radical, nationalist direction.

Alternatively, the reason it may feel as though the deck is stacked against Senate Democrats is that Democrats have all but seized the mantle of structural change against an apartisan chamber built to impede disruption. But as we learned in the 2018 midterm elections, the key to power for Democrats this fall is winning over the suburbs with broadly appealing candidates, moderated platforms, and even some pro-Trump voters. This year, Democrats can again put that successful game plan to work.

Two seats across the suburban states of North Carolina and Iowa, ones Dem-

ocrats held six years ago, are up this year and currently occupied by unpopular incumbents. Both seats are unusually up in Georgia, a state speculated to be trending toward Democrats. Voter expansion laws signed by Gov. Brian Kemp could boost turnout and increase the race's competitiveness. Four seats across urban Colorado and Arizona and less urban Montana and Maine are looking favorable for Democrats. That's eight seats. Democrats can win all of them. Four more seats across Mississippi, Kentucky, Texas, and South Carolina are up this year. Democrats winning these are markedly less likely but far from inconceivable.

To regain and retain power in a large, diverse, multi-majoritarian democracy, Democrats need to be proactive in building an infrastructure locally rather than waiting around for the pendulum to swing back in their direction. Yet there is this notion that if one could wave a wand and "gerrymander" the Seattle metro area into Idaho, dissolve the states entirely, or put every policy to a direct vote of the public, this would reduce partisanship and allow America's true majority to pass the bold and correct policies that middling white men have stymied. The Trump-like sense of entitlement to political power and the impulse to uproot American democracy at the slightest encounter with adversity are premised on a fallacy in punditry in which momentary socio-political trends are presumed to continue unabated — even as a pandemic forces the polity to grapple in new ways with urbanization and globalization and as a diversifying country stands poised to complicate racially essentialist dogmas on the far-Left and far-Right.

The inescapable electoral reality is that no matter how one counts the votes, the country is starkly divided, and that's evident even in the proportional House of Representatives. Whoever gains power in 2020 across Congress and the presidency will likely be governing on a narrow popular margin. Senate Democrats owe progressives for lighting the way, but they will only win back the majority this year with candidates who can competently lead it. ★

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Washington Briefing



CAMPAIGNS

**Biden goes with Harris.
His acceptance speech
will set campaign tone**

CAROLYN KASTER VIA AP IMAGES

Key House and Senate races and the latest polling trends

BIDEN/HARRIS CAMPAIGN

This week is Joe Biden's moment in the spotlight. After keeping his campaign mostly low-key with small digital events since he became his party's presumptive nominee at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the former vice president will accept the Democratic presidential nod via virtual speech on Thursday.

His selection of California Sen. Kamala Harris as his running mate will be flaunted at the convention in hopes of exciting Democrats to vote for the Biden ticket. Harris is at once the most expected, conventional choice and a historic choice, pleasing rank-and-file Democrats by making a black and South Asian woman the presumptive vice presidential nominee.

Picking Harris, who repeatedly adopted far-left policies before walking them back during her own presidential run, also reflects Biden's changing approach to governance and the presidency. Biden increasingly sees himself as a Franklin Delano Roosevelt-like transition figure and is happy to adopt positions further to the left than he ran on in the Democratic primary in an effort to unify the more moderate and far-left wings of the party.

While Biden maintains an average national poll lead of around 7 points, those on his campaign and other Democrats continuously warn not to become complacent due to the favorable poll numbers, citing the 2016 election.

"The thing I'm looking for is: Can Donald Trump get this to a 4-point race?" Democratic analyst and consultant Mary Anne Mash told the *Washington Examiner* last week. "That's where the 2016 race was as it went into Election Day." — by Emily Larsen

THE BIDEN ACCEPTANCE SPEECH: WHAT DOES HE HAVE TO DO?

On Thursday, Joe Biden will give his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention. We asked people of varying backgrounds and ideologies to weight in what they thought Biden should and/or will focus on in his speech:

Amy Walter, national editor of the *Cook Political Report*: "Right now, this election is between Donald Trump and Not Donald Trump. That's worked out pretty well thus far for Biden. But a presidential candidate has to be able to give voters a reason to vote for him/her. What we know that voters are desperate for at this moment is leadership — someone who can navigate and articulate a path forward. That's the job ahead of him at this convention. No need to make it about Trump."

Max Burns, Democratic strategist — "Biden needs to focus on two key areas: convincing hesitant Republicans that his administration will be a safe and predictable alternative to Trump's play-it-by-ear presidency and refining a national message that sells key progressive wish list items like climate action and criminal justice reform to voters turned off by how toxic the partisanship around those issues has become."

Erick Erickson, conservative commentator — "I think his focus will have to be on unity and competence. Biden and Trump both need people off the sidelines. Biden gets the Left off the sidelines with a VP pick. He gets the moderates and independents to come out for him by highlighting his ability to competently steer government and unite people for a common purpose. Essentially, Biden needs to make the case that these are insane times largely because of Trump and that he can bring calm back to our lives."

Shermichael Singleton, political analyst — "Biden needs to present a clear message to the American people that goes deeper than, 'Trump is terrible, so elect me.' His words need to be forward-thinking and aspirational. In essence, he needs to give people something to look forward to. Thus far, he's running on, 'I'm going to make things normal again,' and that doesn't generate excitement."

Joe Scarborough, host of MSNBC's *Morning Joe* — "Joe Biden should use his speech to explain how his presidency will provide Americans with a return to normalcy. How he will fight to preserve constitutional norms, defend the rule of law, and respect checks and balances of Madisonian democracy that Donald Trump ignores. Biden also needs to speak out against the lawless extremists in Portland and across America who spread chaos and undermine the cause of George Floyd, John Lewis, and Martin Luther King Jr."

TRUMP-PENCE CAMPAIGN: TAKING ON THE HARRIS CHOICE

After months of attacking presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden, known variously as "Beijing Biden," "Hidin' Biden," and "Sleepy Joe," Trump's reelection team has a new target: Harris. Biden announced the California Democrat as his running mate ahead of the national convention, and the Trump campaign wasted no time in trying to define her.

"Phony Kamala" is Trump's nickname for Harris, which the campaign hopes will join the annals of Trump sobriquets alongside "Low Energy Jeb" and "Crooked Hillary." It's a Trump branding exercise designed to capture some political weakness as the essence of a given opponent. Harris has a reputation among detractors for political opportunism. This perception helped doom her bid for the Democratic presidential nomination — but not before she leveled her attacks on Biden, which the Trump campaign has also been quick to use against the Democratic ticket.

Team Trump has launched many volleys against Harris, whose nomination

takes on added importance because Biden would be the oldest president in U.S. history. Too many, said Patrick Hynes, a communications consultant who advised the presidential campaigns of Mitt Romney and John McCain. Both the Trump campaign and the Republican National Committee have called her a radical, a disappointment to progressives, a reckless prosecutor — charges that may be individually true, Hynes said, but taken together add up to “muddled messaging.” GOP operatives say the key is to find and land on one line of attack and prosecute it through Election Day. — *by W. James Antle III*

HOUSE RACES: IS DON YOUNG VULNERABLE?

The list of Rep. Don Young’s politically incorrect utterances over his 47-year House career is too long to recount. Eyeing November, Democrats think the Alaska Republican’s off-the-cuff approach will catch up with him just as swing state polls show voters getting weary of Trump’s incendiary style.

The House Democrats’ campaign arm is once again arguing that Young is vulnerable. It’s something it’s been trying since Young, now 87, first won Alaska’s lone House seat in a March 1973 special election.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee is talking up the chances of Alyse Galvin, who is running as an independent along Democratic lines, emphasizing the former, since Alaska remains a Republican-leaning state.

A Public Policy Polling survey released July 10 shows Galvin, a professional educator by background, leading Young 43%-41%.

Democrats point to the epic list of Young’s controversial statements. In 2010, Young described the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico as “not an environmental disaster” but a “natural” phenomenon. And in 2014, the former tugboat captain told a group of high school students who were mourning the suicide of a classmate that suicides could be blamed on a “lack of support” from family and friends.

That’s just a sampling of old statements Democrats are dredging up, implicitly linking the most senior House member, known as its dean, to Trump. Alaskans are tired of being embarrassed by their leaders in Washington, goes this line of argument.

There’s some reason to think this is having an effect. That same PPP poll shows Trump leading Biden in Alaska 48%-45%, which would make for the closest Republican win in the state since 1960.

But Young doesn’t seem to be sweating it and is confident of reelection. Young’s campaign website says he is “fortunate to have been named among the top 10 most effective lawmakers in Congress, crediting a laser-like focus on Alaska policy issues and the ability to move bills through the legislative process.” — *by David Mark*

SENATE RACES: DEMOCRATS ON THE MARCH, BUT GARY PETERS STANDS ALONE

Michigan’s junior senator is one of two vulnerable Democrats on the fall ballot — and the only one up for reelection in a swing state. Senate Democrats are expressing confidence about Peters, pointing to sizable leads over Republican challenger John James in most public opinion polls. But the incumbent might be more concerned than his colleagues back in Washington. This month, the senator took to the airwaves in conservative northern Michigan (not metropolitan Detroit) to highlight his cooperation with Trump to protect the state’s cherry crop from unfair trade practices by Turkey.

“Gary even went directly to President Trump in the White House,” cherry grower association CFO Nels Veliquette says in a television advertisement from the Peters campaign, as a flattering picture of Trump flashes on the screen.

Trump is especially reviled on the Left — and the president trails presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden in Michigan in any event, weighed down by voter dissatisfaction with his handling of the coronavirus. In tying himself to such a president, even in a

geographically targeted ad, Peters is signaling that he believes he has a fight on his hands with James down the stretch of the fall campaign. And with Republicans defending a narrow three-seat majority and under threat in as many as seven states, whether Peters can hang on could determine the balance of power in the Senate come 2021.

LATEST POLLING NEWS

In the *RealClearPolitics* average in a head-to-head matchup, Biden leads Trump by just over 7 points. The good news for Trump? Hillary Clinton had a similar lead at this time in 2016. The bad news for Trump? He hasn’t led in national poll since February. Naturally, the question remains whether Joe Biden gets a “convention bump,” but with the pandemic affecting the event to the point that Biden won’t accept the nomination in person, it remains to be seen what happens in the days after. In the battleground states, Biden enjoys small leads in three states that Trump won in 2016 that had been Democratic strongholds — Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan.

On the Senate side, elections raters at *RealClearPolitics* declared last week that South Carolina’s Senate race is a “toss-up” despite incumbent Sen. Lindsey Graham having an average polling lead of 8 points over Democratic challenger Jamie Harrison. Republican Sen. Martha McSally is hoping to fend off astronaut Mark Kelly, but she has about half the money in her war chest that he has as of July 15: \$11 million compared to \$21.2 million. Recent polls consistently show Kelly with a lead, sometimes a double-digit lead.

In the House, Republicans are not optimistic about taking back control but could still see some gains and not losses. Republicans think they may be able to flip some Democratic-held seats that Trump won, such as longtime Democratic Rep. Collin Peterson’s seat in Minnesota’s 7th Congressional District. A Republican internal poll last week found his challenger, former Minnesota Lt. Gov. Michelle Fishbach, ahead of Peterson by 10 points. — *by Emily Larsen and Jay Caruso ★*



WHITE HOUSE

US language about China shifts to downgrade 'President' Xi Jinping

New terminology reflects a heightened adversarial tone between the two nations

By Rob Crilly

There's a new candor in relations between the United States and China. At least from the Washington side.

While Beijing refers to where Uighurs are held as Vocational Education and Training Centers, they are "concentration camps" operating purely for the mass internment of a persecuted religious minority, according to Washington. In June, four Chinese news organizations

operating in the U.S. were redesignated as "foreign missions" to show their ties to the country's authoritarian rulers.

And most notably, Xi Jinping is no longer "President Xi" in statements. Rather, he is "General Secretary Xi," reflecting the administration's view that his power comes from his position in the Communist Party rather than from the people of China.

The benefits in calling a spade a spade are clear for the Trump administration as

it ratchets up pressure on Beijing, exposes doublespeak, and tries to drive a wedge between the country's communist rulers and its population.

But if that wasn't irritation enough for Xi's regime, U.S. officials said they are merely taking inspiration from the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius and his strictures on the dangers of hypocrisy.

So, when the State Department reclassified China Central Television, the *Global Times*, and others as foreign missions, the White House National Security Council posted a gleeful tweet. "In Confucianism, this is known as the Rectification of Names," it said.

The tweet was more than a cheeky aside. It reflected a course set out two years ago by Matthew Pottinger, then the senior director for Asia at the National Security Council.

Where China talked about cooperation, he substituted the word "competition." And he delivered it all in Mandarin during an event to mark China's National Day at its Washington embassy with a lesson in Confucius. "If names cannot be correct, then language is not in accordance with the truth of things, and if language is not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success," he said to giggles.

In the latest move on Thursday, State Department officials announced they were designating Chinese-funded Confucius Institutes, ostensibly cultural and language centers, as "foreign missions," requiring them to register personnel and property just like an embassy.

"This is a Confucian rectification of names, as many of you understand," said Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David Stilwell. "We're simply calling these things what they are: These are arms of the Chinese Communist Party."

In short, using the wrong words makes it impossible to deal with reality.

Confucius was not mentioned, but that spirit rippled through a new White House China strategy published in May.

"Guided by a return to principled realism, the United States is responding to the CCP's direct challenge," it said, inserting the Chinese Communist Party where the

whole of China might have been implicated before “by acknowledging that we are in a strategic competition and protecting our interests appropriately.”

So, where U.S. officials might once have politely welcomed the rise of China while wondering how to square that with protecting and stimulating growth at home, now they emphasize Beijing’s threat to U.S. jobs.

Last month, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo became the highest-ranking U.S. official to use the term “concentration camp” to describe the facilities where Uighurs are being held.

The new honesty comes with risks. Some analysts point out that doublespeak has a purpose in diplomacy, allowing rivals to enter negotiation under the cover of vague language that can be shaped to either side’s benefit as a precursor to more concrete agreement. A dose of hy-



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is the highest ranking official to use the term ‘concentration camp’ to describe the facilities where Uighurs are being held.

pocrisy and a blind eye are frequently the price of getting things done.

But for now, Xi must stomach the indignity of losing his presidential title. Pompeo led the way, using “general secretary” at least eight times in the past month, followed by the attorney general, the secretary of state, the national secu-

rity adviser, and the director of the FBI in major set piece speeches.

For example, the FBI’s Christopher Wray deployed it in denouncing Operation Fox Hunt, which China claims is a global anti-corruption operation.

“Instead, Fox Hunt is a sweeping bid by General Secretary Xi to target Chinese nationals whom he sees as threats and who live outside China, across the world,” he said during a Hudson Institute video event. But not quite everyone in the administration is up to speed with Confucian strictures, it seems.

“I had a great relationship with President Xi,” Trump said in a radio interview last week, describing the state of relations between Washington and Beijing. “I like him, but I don’t feel the same way now.” ★

Rob Crilly is a political reporter for the Washington Examiner.

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ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

US fuel-makers could face 'irreparable' damage from demand collapse and the move to green policy

Car travel is up but air travel is still down as is refinery utilization

By Josh Siegel

U.S. fuel-makers continue to suffer from the pandemic-caused demand collapse and are facing an uncertain future as people avoid flying and refiners face the prospect of more strict environmental regulations.

"Thankfully, I am not invested in refineries," said Tom Kloza, global head of energy analysis at IHS Markit and founder of Oil Price Information Service. "They are having a pretty miserable year. They don't have a marquee hydrocarbon making a reasonable return right now."

President Trump and Republican policymakers have spent significant political capital during the coronavirus pandemic tending to the wounds of shale oil producers, but refiners that transform the crude into fuels for consumers are facing immediate risks and long-term worries. The refining industry has a strong presence in swing states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio, whereas the shale industry is dominant in red states.

Consumption of gasoline and diesel has mostly recovered as drivers return to roads with the reopening of economies

and trucks, trains, boats, and barges transport products to people staying home.

But global air traffic was still down about 67% in July as travelers avoided being cooped up on planes, the International Energy Agency reported Thursday.

The agency reduced its 2020 oil demand expectations for the first time in three months, citing in large part the continued weakness in jet fuel demand.

"Jet fuel will eventually recover, but it will take a long time to get back anywhere close to the 2019 levels," Kloza said. "2019 was the last decent year for refiners."

Jet fuel is a small percentage of the refining industry's total output, typically at 8%-10% of production. But before the pandemic, it was a source of predictable profits, less cyclical than gasoline demand, which picks up in the summer, and diesel, a big money-maker in the fall and winter.

"Demand still has a major Achilles's heel in jet fuel, a fuel that typically was the relative constant in the demand column compared to more sensitive but larger supply of gasoline and diesel," said Frederick Lawrence, an oil industry economist.

At the worst point of the pandemic, with little demand for their fuel, refineries operated at about 30% lower capacity



than what they usually do, and some shut down operations completely.

Refineries are now operating at 81% utilization, according to the Energy Information Administration, but that's still less than 95% from a year ago, and many are struggling financially or operationally.

"We have a little bit of a profit margin now, and we are not losing tens of millions of dollars a day, depending on the facility and where you are," said a refining industry lobbyist.

Derrick Morgan, senior vice president of federal and regulatory affairs for American Fuel & Petrochemicals Manufacturers, the top U.S. refining industry lobby, has counted five refineries that have permanently closed during the pandemic.

The refinery industry was already wounded last year when the East Coast's largest and oldest refinery, the Philadelphia Energy Solutions Refining Complex, permanently shut down after a massive fire.

Some refiners are preparing for a more uncertain future as consumption of traditional oil-based fuels lags and the potential for more environmental regulations looms.

Phillips 66 plans to convert a San Francisco-area oil refinery into the "world's largest" renewable fuels plant, the company announced Wednesday.

Phillips 66 is transforming its Rodeo refinery into Rodeo Renewed, reconfiguring the facility to produce 800 million gallons per year of renewable diesel, renewable gasoline, and sustainable jet fuel using cooking oils, fats, greases, and soybean oils.

The company cited California's low-carbon fuel standard, which aims to cut emissions and reduce petroleum in transportation fuels, as a reason for the change.

Marathon, the largest U.S. fuel-maker, HollyFrontier Corp, and CVR Energy also have begun or have pledged similar conversions to renewable production.

Morgan said those transitions show the flexibility of U.S. refiners, which are distinguished globally because of their ability to handle different types of crude, but he noted that renewable fuels are more expensive to produce and require less manpower.

Marathon acknowledged job losses from its decision to idle two refineries, which includes a commitment to evaluate converting one of them, in California, to produce renewable diesel.

"There is certainly a need for renewable fuels given existing regulatory programs, so you are seeing a move to produce fuels needed to comply," Morgan said.

But the industry so far has faced mostly state and local regulatory threats, including an effort by northeast states to create a nationwide cap-and-trade program for transportation fuels this year.

That could change in a Joe Biden administration. The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee has promised strengthening fuel-efficiency standards that Trump weakened, along with pledging major investments into electric vehicles. The Biden campaign has also called for stricter airline greenhouse gas emissions rules.

"Now is not the time to double and

triple down on environmental mandates when the refining industry is struggling," Morgan said.

Morgan is hopeful Biden would listen to refining industry concerns as president, noting the Democrat's past support for refineries operating in and around his home state of Delaware.

He said that the lobby group, if Biden wins, intends to press him to support legislation reforming the contested Renewable Fuel Standard by replacing the RFS with a "technology-neutral" octane standard. High-octane fuels are more efficient and can withstand more compression before igniting.

"We know you want to move to electric vehicles, but why not make the internal combustion engine fleet more efficient at the same time?" Morgan said. "Biden has historically been fair and wanted to protect those jobs."

But analysts said the refining industry, like the oil-producing sector, is likely to face bankruptcies and consolidation, as bigger companies are able to transition more easily to alternative fuels.

"The prolonged hit to demand will likely force a wave of closures of less economic refineries," said Allyson Cutright, director of Global Oil Service at consultancy Rapidan Energy Group.

"We could be moving into a survival-of-the-fittest period," the refining industry source said. "You will see a more consolidated industry."

That process has been accelerated by the pandemic, in which even the future of driving, despite its recent comeback, is uncertain.

For example, public school buses, which run on diesel, could stay parked this fall if schools don't reopen, while a shift to remote work for businesses could become permanent.

"Think about what's at stake in the next month or so," Kloza said. "You can see where every part of the finished refined barrel is compromised by COVID-19 and the reaction and memory from it, damage that has been done that might be irreparable." ★

Josh Siegel is an energy & environment reporter for the Washington Examiner.



"Daily on Energy" is a morning newsletter written by Washington Examiner energy and environment writer Josh Siegel and Abby Smith. Subscribe for free at newsletters.washingtonexaminer.com.

FINANCE & ECONOMICS

Mike Braun: According metrics of Fauci and Birx, we have achieved best possible scenario with virus

The Indiana senator weighs in on key economic relief issues to address

By Nihal Krishan

The *Washington Examiner* interviewed Sen. Mike Braun, a Republican from Indiana, to discuss many current events, including the economic relief package being negotiated, President Trump's response to the virus, criticism from Democrats, and more.

In the Senate, he serves on the Aging Committee, Agriculture Committee, Budget Committee, Environment and Public Works Committee, and the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee.

Before becoming a senator in 2018, Braun was the founder and CEO of Meyer Distributing, an auto parts distribution company he built in his hometown of Jasper. He also served in the Indiana House of Representatives.

Braun, 66, studied economics at Wabash College and received his MBA from Harvard Business School. He married his high school sweetheart, Maureen Braun, who also owns her own business. They have four grown children.

Washington Examiner: What's most important to you of all the economic relief issues we have: unemployment, food stamps, small business relief, and of course healthcare costs?

Braun: Very simply, three things: Those that are at the lowest end of the pay scale and have lost their job due to government approach to COVID, that's

No. 1. Then, the smallest of businesses that have been impacted. And three, I'm going to be for anybody that was just left out through some type of error and/or omission — or companies that might have fallen through the cracks. But all that would all be under a trillion dollars. I'm fairly certain.

Washington Examiner: How do you think the Democrats would respond to the virus if they were completely in charge?

Braun: I think they would probably start doing some of the things Republicans have been talking about. Probably not 100% focused on kind of the disease itself at the expense of the economic patient because I think at that point, you know, they would own the virus response. I think there would be a different way to do it because the smartest way to do it is to do both things at once. Learn everything we've learned about the disease. Take it seriously. Don't shut the economy down in a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach. I think where that's been done, you'll see the economies are going to have a lot more trouble recovering. Of course, their point of view is until you deal with the virus, you don't have a chance to get the economy back on its feet. I think they're saying that simply because it benefits them politically for the next 90 days.



Washington Examiner: Is there anything that you would do differently from President Trump regarding the virus response, particularly when it comes to safety protocols, protections, and testing?

Braun: Of course the Dems aren't going to say it, but I know it as a CEO: You can't produce stuff out of thin air. I was amazed that PPE, ventilators, just basic materials, got solved much more quickly than it normally would. And when it came to other things like testing, I just got an email from Roy Blunt and Lamar Alexander that soon, before the end of the year, we're going to have tests that are quick and accurate that go for between a buck and five bucks apiece. I think all of that has moved at a speed ... quicker than what it would have been under a more bureaucratic approach. So I think Trump's done a decent job at

it. When you focus only on the number of cases, which are probably 10 to 20 times as many, then of course it's going to sound bad.

Washington Examiner: One just tries to compare our response to the virus with other countries, and we seem to have had a very different response and set of outcomes than other countries. That's what causes one to reflect on what could be done better. We seem to be the worst of the lot, in terms of cases and deaths, at least at the moment.

Braun: I think that when it comes to the final determination on whose economy has been hurt the worst, we won't know that until more years pass to see how it actually pans out. And to be honest, it's too early to tell.

Washington Examiner: Have there

been any unnoticed victories from the past few weeks that you think haven't gotten the attention but should?

Braun: One thing is that back in March, when [Anthony] Fauci and [Deborah] Birx were talking about what a good number would be in terms of keeping a lid on the virus. I think they're on record saying around 150,000 fatalities by Aug. 1. So according to their metrics, we have essentially gone down the path of the best possible scenario when you measure it as you should — by keeping a lid on fatalities. ... They are on record saying that. So that's kind of a disconnect to me. I'm surprised. But generally, you're not going to hear that from the mainstream media. I'm surprised more haven't pointed that out. ★

Nihal Krishan is a reporter for the Washington Examiner.

The graphic features the Washington Examiner logo at the top, with the tagline "THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER BRINGS ITS READERS THE BEST IN BREAKING NEWS AND ANALYSIS ON POLITICS." Below this, three smartphones are displayed, each showing a different platform: the left phone shows the Washington Examiner website, the middle phone shows the Washington Examiner Facebook page, and the right phone shows the Washington Examiner Twitter page. The background is a collage of various news images. At the bottom, a blue banner contains the text "FOLLOW US TODAY @WASHINGTONEXAMINER" and "WASHINGTON EXAMINER" with social media icons for Facebook and Twitter.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Biden advocated 'no first use' policy as VP. Would he change nuclear doctrine as president?

If he wins, Biden will have to address critical national security issues early in his administration

By Jamie McIntyre

Just nine days before President-elect Trump took the oath of office in 2017, then-Vice President Joe Biden gave a speech in Washington in which he advocated a fundamental change in U.S. nuclear deterrence policy: a public declaration that America would never be the first to use nuclear weapons in a future conflict.

"Given our nonnuclear capabilities and the nature of today's threats, it's hard to envision a plausible scenario in which the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States would be necessary or make sense," Biden said.

"The next administration will put forward its own policies," he said, but he argued, "President Obama and I are confident we can deter and defend ourselves and our allies against nonnuclear threats through other means."

"Deterring, and, if necessary, retaliat-

ing against a nuclear attack should be the sole purpose of the U.S. nuclear arsenal," he added.

Trump and his initial national security team, which included his defense secretary, retired Marine Gen. Jim Mattis, and national security adviser Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, did indeed go another way, not only rejecting any idea of forswearing the first use of nuclear weapons but expanding the conditions under which adversaries might be subject to a nuclear strike from the U.S.

The language was included in a rewrite of the Pentagon's Nuclear Posture Review, published in February 2018, which said the U.S. reserved the right to respond with nuclear weapons to a conventional, chemical, biological, or cyber attack in "extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners."

Under the revised nuclear doctrine,

"extreme circumstances" would include "significant nonnuclear attacks" on strategic assets, including targets such as population centers, critical civilian infrastructure, or any attack on U.S. or allied nuclear forces, command and control facilities, or early warning radars or satellites.

The precept that the U.S., the world's premier nuclear power, should never rule out the first use of nuclear weapons is one that previous presidents, including George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama, have questioned but never changed.

Most but not all of the four-star commanders who have been in charge of America's strategic arsenal have flatly rejected the idea of a no-first-use declaration.

"I think the current policy is exactly right. It's been that way through multiple administrations. I think it's important



to continue that policy. It improves our strategic deterrent. It improves the support that we give to our allies,” testified Air Force Gen. John Hyten in April 2019 when he was still head of U.S. Strategic Command.

“When I travel overseas, the extended deterrent message I bring from the United States is hugely powerful to our allies that have chosen not to build their own nuclear weapons and to trust that the United States nuclear umbrella will cover them,” he told a House Armed Services subcommittee.

But Marine Gen. James Cartwright, who served as STRATCOM commander under President George W. Bush, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs under Obama, and went on to become a member of the arms control group Global Zero, came to view “no first use” as the only rational doctrine.

“A no-first-use policy would ... reduce the risks of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons,” he wrote along with fellow arms control advocate Bruce Blair in a *New York Times* op-ed in 2016.

“Although a no-first-use policy would limit the president’s discretion by imposing procedural and physical constraints on his or her ability to initiate the use of nuclear weapons, we believe such checks on the commander in chief would serve the national interest,” they wrote. “Nuclear weapons today no longer serve any purpose beyond deterring the first use of such weapons by our adversaries.”

Given his public statements and the failure of his mentor Obama to make any progress on his vision of “a world without nuclear weapons,” Biden may find the argument for a no-first-use declaration persuasive, as laid out in a new book by former Clinton Defense Secretary William Perry.

In *The Button*, co-written with Tom Collina of the Ploughshares Fund, Perry argues that there is a realistic scenario in which the world’s dominant conventional military power needs nuclear weapons to deter or respond to nonnuclear threats. “How can the United States

possibly convince other nations that they do not need nuclear weapons if the United States itself says it needs them for non-nuclear threats?” he asks.

But military commanders argue that the point of maintaining the option of first use is to add another level of deterrence, to ensure no adversary miscalculates or underestimates the willingness of the U.S. to protect itself and its allies.

“I think anything that simplifies an enemy’s decision-making calculus would be a mistake,” Gen. Joseph Dunford, then the Joint Chiefs chairman, told Congress last year. “I’m very comfortable with the policy that we have right now, what creates a degree of ambiguity.”

Of course, because historically, the president, in his role as commander in chief, has had the sole authority to launch nuclear weapons, each president can have an individual policy about when to launch. The president doesn’t have to announce it to anyone. It can just remain a personal conviction.

Which brings up a second argument from Perry and Collina: It’s time, they say, to reconsider whether a single person should have the power to end the world.

“No president should have to make that awesome decision quickly, without deliberation and consultation; no president should have the sole authority to launch nuclear weapons first,” they argue. “In the case of first use, we support current legislation to require a declaration of war by Congress that specifically authorizes a nuclear attack before the president can use nuclear weapons.”

History provides a cautionary tale.

“The president could be emotionally unstable or under the influence of drugs or alcohol and could impulsively choose to initiate nuclear war at any time,” they write, and here they are thinking of one

president in particular: Richard Nixon, who they say had a well-documented

“tendency to drink alcohol to excess.”

In 1969, when a U.S. spy plane was downed by North Korea over the Sea of Japan, killing 31 Americans, “Nixon became incensed and ordered a tactical nuclear strike,” Perry and Collina recount, citing George Carver, the CIA’s top Vietnam specialist at the time.

“The Joint Chiefs were alerted and asked to recommend targets, but [national security adviser Henry] Kissinger got on the phone to them. They agreed not to do anything until Nixon sobered up.”

Both Russia and China have some version of a declared “no first use” policy. In the case of Russia, its military doctrine calls for the use of nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction against it first.

But those declarations aren’t worth the paper they are written on, Adm. Chas Richard, the current U.S. strategic commander, told Republican Sen. Josh Hawley earlier this year.

“Senator, I think I could drive a truck through that ‘no first use’ policy,” Richard testified at an Armed Services Committee hearing in February, noting that Beijing doesn’t have the same definition of “first use” as the U.S. does.

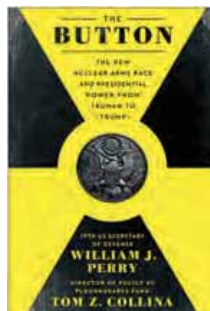
“They are very opaque about what their intentions are,” Richard said. “So, what constitutes first use? Where might they say, ‘That’s our territory,’ right? ‘Therefore, it doesn’t count as an attack against you.’”

In a presidential debate in September 2016, then-candidate Trump was asked directly if he supported the current policy.

“I would certainly not do first strike. I think that once the nuclear alternative happens, it’s over,” Trump said, but then he added the caveat that all prior presidents have cited. “At the same time, we have to be prepared. I can’t take anything off the table.” ★

Jamie McIntyre is senior national security reporter for the Washington Examiner.

 Jamie McIntyre is the Washington Examiner's senior writer on national security. His morning newsletter, "Jamie McIntyre's Daily on Defense," is free by email subscription at dailyondefense.com.



TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

Metro may no longer be on fire, but the agency is seeing a different kind of red

DC transit system says it requires assistance to avoid layoffs and abandoning projects

By Jeremy Lott

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, known as Metro, runs busses and commuter rail in the greater Washington area. The whole operation is bleeding cash, losing over \$2 million a day.

Two out of the three government partners that usually help bridge the financial gap, Virginia and Maryland, are strapped. What this all means is that Metro is likely headed for layoffs, furloughs, delayed and canceled projects, and significant service reductions if Congress doesn't step in.

Metro's latest coronavirus-fueled woes come after years of scheduled and unscheduled delays and extensive track maintenance were starting to pay off for commuters.

Metro rail cars are powered by electricity, delivered via a third rail. Insulation on those electrical conduits had degraded over time. Other elements of the system had fallen on poor repair as well, and by the mid-2010s, it showed. The systemwide degradation led to deadly derailments, random electrical arcing, fires, and arguments about those fires. The website *IsMetroOnFire.com* reported 73 fires in Metro stations in the first quarter of 2016. Metro famously contested this figure by saying that there was only smoke in some of those cases.

Robert Puentes is president of the Eno Center for Transportation in Washington. He told the *Washington Examiner* that Metro's current problems are "all related to COVID."

After years of struggling with maintenance delays, "the agency actually was making a lot of progress," Puentes said.

Ridership was up, and all the critical metrics were "moving in the right direction."

When the pandemic came to the region, that all changed rapidly. Metro was actually telling people not to use its services unless necessary. "It's like opening a restaurant and asking people not to come in and eat there," Puentes said.

Rail ridership declined by "at least 90%." Bus ridership fell as well, though not as steeply.

Puentes thinks the transportation agency needs to stay the course. It can lure riders back over time by playing up "all these new cleaning protocols," as well as insisting on wearing a mask and social distancing.

In the meantime, Metro is going to need money to keep running at the current speed. Over 120 members of the House of Representatives, including Transportation Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio, wrote a letter to House leadership calling for \$32 billion in additional funding for public transportation as part of any future coronavirus bailout package.

Puentes thinks that Metro's cut of that would be enough to keep things from derailing. He's also heard a compromise figure of \$15 billion or so discussed. That would be better than nothing but would likely only "kick the can down the road," requiring a future bailout, he said.

Baruch Feigenbaum is director of transportation policy at the Reason Foundation, with offices in both California and Washington. He disagrees with Puentes's assessment of Metro and his funding-first approach to addressing Metro's problems.

"[Metro] is in a lot of trouble, especially over the long term," Feigenbaum told the

Washington Examiner. "WMATA already needed major subsidies from the local governments pre-COVID. With COVID, many folks are going to be hesitant to board trains and buses, so ridership is unlikely to recover for years, if ever, necessitating even larger subsidies."

He worries that "short-term bailouts may prevent transit agencies from making long-term changes." Feigenbaum believes Metro should coordinate transit services rather than operating them by contracting out rail and bus operations. Metro considered doing this with its new silver line, but pushback by unions nixed it.

Feigenbaum also argued the federalist point that "mass transit is a regional service that should be funded regionally," not by Congress.

Whether more federal funding will come for Metro this year is an open question. Negotiations over further COVID-19 relief between the two houses of Congress and the White House broke down. President Trump recently issued several executive orders and other administrative actions for the executive branch to do what it could in Congress's absence.

A spokesperson for the Federal Transportation Agency told the *Washington Examiner* that Metro already "received \$876,806,108 to cover operating and COVID-19-related expenses, including salaries, leave for affected employees, cleaning supplies, and personal protective equipment" as part of the CARES Act bailout bill Trump signed in March.

The FTA further explained: "We expect that many transit agencies will continue to spend their CARES Act funds through 2021."

The *Washington Examiner* repeatedly asked the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris campaign what should be done to address Metro's "massive shortfall, with huge layoffs and service reductions looming," and if they have any plans to "address the problem if elected" to the White House.

By press time, the Biden campaign only replied, "Thank you for emailing Biden for President. We will respond to your message as soon as possible." ★

Jeremy Lott is a contributor for the Washington Examiner.

HEALTHCARE

Emergency physicians: Pandemic compounds stress of difficult job

Doctors are struggling emotionally and physically due to pandemic demands

By David Hogberg

Emergency physician is an occupation that, by its nature, is extremely stressful. The coronavirus pandemic has caused that stress to grow enormously.

“It is nothing like I have ever experienced in my 17 years of practicing,” said Dr. Aisha Terry, an emergency physician and associate professor at George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences. “At moments, it has been surreal and unbelievable. It has been quite taxing physically as well as emotionally.”

Emergency physicians sometimes view themselves as durable and resilient since, more than any other specialty, they often must manage situations in which every decision is a matter of life or death.

“We wear this hat that we’re lifesavers,” said Dr. Mohamed Hagahmed, an emergency physician and faculty member at the University of Texas at San Antonio. “The pandemic has shown how vulnerable we are to emotional and mental stress.”

Many emergency physicians struggle mentally and emotionally because of their careers. A 2013 study by the Mayo Clinic and the American Medical Association found that 60% of emergency physicians suffered from some kind of burnout, more so than any other specialty.

The pandemic has only worsened the problem. A survey published in the *Academic Emergency Medicine* asked emergency room physicians to rate the effect the pandemic had on both work and home stress levels on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being “not at all” and 7 being

“extremely.” The median response was 5.

Many factors related to the pandemic have contributed to the worsening stress. Early on, the unknowns regarding the necessary personal protective equipment and treatment of the disease were particularly unnerving.

“There were so many uncertainties about what was going on,” said Hagahmed. “We knew we had to wear masks, but there was confusion over whether we should be wearing N95 masks all of the time. There was also confusion about what proper isolation precautions should be. We had to rely on the experiences of harder-hit areas like New York City.”

There was also a pronounced sense of helplessness because many patients could not be saved.

“We go to work to do what we got into medicine for in the first place, to manage disease, take care of patients, and save lives,” said Terry, who is also a board member of the American College of Emergency Physicians. “The virus created doubt in our ability to do that because we had never seen this kind of thing before. There were instances where our fundamental sense of purpose for being a physician had been undermined.”

Compounding that sense of helplessness was the much larger than usual number of patients whose condition could deteriorate quickly.

“For me, most of the psychological distress came from seeing folks that present acutely ill, and then they decompensate. That is, patients come in, and you can tell they are in some distress, and then all of a

sudden, they crash. They lose consciousness or stop breathing,” said Hagahmed.

One reason so many patients went to the emergency room in dire condition was that they were afraid to go to the hospital for fear of contracting the virus. That caused more stress for Hagahmed.

“A lot of my patients avoided coming to the emergency department until the last minute, until they were about ready to break,” he said. “I would like the general public to know that waiting until the last minute puts patients at the highest risk for getting worse. By coming to the hospital early, a patient is more likely to have a better outcome.”

Finally, the stress of treating COVID-19 patients could often spill over into the home.

Terry noted that on days when she was around a lot of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 or around many patients who were coughing and sneezing, she worried that she was at a higher risk of infection. She didn’t want to bring the disease home with her.

“I would at times quarantine away from my husband for days on end,” said Terry. “I’ve never had to do that before, and it was mentally stressful. In the long run, it’s just not sustainable.”

As noted, many emergency physicians view themselves as lifesavers. That view, though, can make it difficult to reach out for help: Asking for help can be seen as a sign of weakness. Hagahmed suggested that more emergency physicians realizing that they are vulnerable might be a silver lining of the pandemic.

“Seeing that many lives lost and the burden of caring for that large volume of people and seeing how that affected our mental and emotional health — that made us more cognizant of our own emotional and mental vulnerability,” he said. “I’m kind of thankful for that because it not only helped us see the problem but be open about it and seek help if needed.”

Hagahmed, though, has not yet sought help for his stress.

“I have not sought any professional help, but I do need to.” ★

David Hogberg is a healthcare reporter for the Washington Examiner.

BEDARD

Washington Secrets

Like America: Half of Trump's staff are women

It's been said since the Reagan era that "personnel is policy."

So, when we reviewed new White House staffing numbers, it came as a bit of a surprise that in an administration led by a president often accused as anti-women in his policies and sometimes words that nearly half of the staff is female.

What's more, a quarter, or 56, hold top "commissioned" jobs, including the directors of domestic policy, legislative affairs, political affairs, cabinet affairs, the press and communications offices, the personnel office, and 11 others.

"That seems sizable," said Kathryn Tenpas, a nonresident senior fellow for Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution. "I don't think the numbers look bad," she added.

In announcing Sen. Kamala Harris as

his running mate, Joe Biden suggested that Trump has trouble with women. "Is anyone surprised Donald Trump has a problem with strong women?" he asked.

Trump's team, however, said the numbers of women he and the vice president rely on just inside the White House, not counting the Cabinet, tell a different story.

Here is the raw data:

- Forty-eight percent of the overall White House staff is female: 216 to 234 men.
- Three hundred and fifteen are political appointees: 169 men, 146 women.
- The staff of the president and first lady is 48% female: 181 women, 194 men.
- The vice president has 26 female staffers and 40 men.
- The vice president's wife, Karen Pence, only employs women and has nine.
- Half of the national security council staff are women.



The numbers are a smidge better than the general workforce in America, in which 47% are women. And it's much better than the news industry that regularly attacks the president on women's policies. In newsrooms, just 41% are women, according to the Women's Media Center.

"Not only does President Trump uplift the women in his administration, he implements policies that empower women across the country," said press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, the third woman to hold that job.

In the Obama administration, there were more women than men, but the staff was bigger, and a recent *Washington Examiner* report found that Trump, more than any other president, has more as top advisers.

And while Obama had several women as top advisers, led by Valerie Jarrett, they had to fight to stop men from talking over them.

Not so in the Trump White House, where the top female voices are forceful and include Ivanka Trump, adviser to the president, Kellyanne Conway, assistant to the president and senior counselor, Brooke Rollins, assistant to the president and acting director of domestic policy, longtime ally Hope Hicks, an assistant and counselor, McEnany, and jack of all trades Stephanie Grisham, an assistant and chief of staff to first lady Melania Trump.

They also said that they aren't treated differently because of their sex. "He gives respect equally. Don't write a story that says, 'Women this; women that.' That doesn't come into it. It's how we do the job that seems to matter," said an insider.

As with past administrations, there is a gender wage gap. In Trump's White House, it is about 15%, said Mark Perry, who has studied White House salaries



for the American Enterprise Institute. The gap is influenced by younger women straight out of college in low-experience jobs.

In her new book, *Off the Record*, Madeleine Westerhout, the former director of Oval Office Operations, noted that she had been passed over for the title by her boss, who called her inexperienced for the job she had been essentially doing for two years.

So, on the advice of Conway, Ivanka Trump, and former spokeswoman Sarah Sanders, she approached the president alone when the job came open again.

His reaction? “That sounds good,” he told her.

“You can complain about some of the comments he’s made about women over the years, but when it came down to it, he stood up for me, just as he has stood up for Kellyanne, Sarah, Hope, and countless other women he has surrounded himself with,” Westerhout said. ★

It’s still about the economy

It’s been 28 years James Carville first barked, “It’s the economy, stupid,” to help Bill Clinton beat President George H.W. Bush, and



Celinda Lak

nothing has changed since.

In presenting their highly anticipated “Battleground Poll” this week, Democrat Celinda Lake and Republican Ed Goeas said that even amid the coronavirus crisis, it is the economy that is tops on the minds of voters.

Lake said that the edge voters give to Trump on the economy is the one thing blocking Joe Biden from a blowout win. To cut into Trump’s advantage, she said, Biden needs to “connect the dots” on the issues he is strong on to the economy.

But she added, “If Trump can climb his way up on the economy, he will have a shot come November.”

For Trump to win, said Goeas, he has to get back on an economic message. “The president has to get on the economy and get back the numbers on the economy, or he is in a very deep hole that he is not going to be able to get out of,” he said. ★

ON DEEP BACKGROUND

★ They’ve got over 1,200 videos posted on YouTube, but the first by **Diamond and Silk** almost didn’t happen. “I didn’t know how to upload it to YouTube,”

said Diamond in their new book, *Uprising: Who the Hell Said You Can’t Ditch and Switch?* Silk was eventually able to post it, and their first endorsement of Donald

Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign 20 days after his announcement began their new video career, they revealed in the book being released on Tuesday. ... ★ Keep an eye on **Jim Gilmore**, the administration’s man in Vienna, who is hardening his stance against Russia and becoming a leading U.S. voice criticizing the Kremlin’s efforts to destabilize the region it is in. As the U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation, he is trying to break through all the other news in the world to keep attention on Russian **President Vladimir Putin**, said a U.S. diplomat. ... ★ It’s finally happened. The

Interior Department’s plan to farm out key offices has led to the opening of the new Bureau of Land Management headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado. Every employee who wanted to move from Washington will be in the new HQ by the end of August. ... ★ Capitol Hill is mourning the death of **Donnald Anderson**, a long-serving House officer who rose to be clerk of the House, one of the key positions that keep the chamber running. He died on July 30 in Sacramento. He came to Washington as a House page and was remembered by the U.S. Capitol Page Alumni Association as a mentor to hundreds of pages. ... ★



Business



RETAIL

Fitness equipment flying off shelves as people stay fit sheltering at home

Closed gyms and coronavirus fears have changed how people exercise

By Jay Heflin

The fear of coronavirus infection while exercising at the local health club has prompted huge sales in home fitness equipment.

"I've never seen anything like this. It's completely crazy," said Nathan Person, east district manager for Johnson Fitness & Wellness, a home exercise equipment store with over 90 outlets in the United States.

Person has sold exercise gear for 15 years and said that sales are roughly three times higher than normal, though some equipment will not be available in the U.S. until next year at the earliest.

"We've been told by many, many manufacturers that the earliest would be January, but most of them are projecting longer than that," he said, adding that before the pandemic hit the U.S., "You could walk in and buy anything because we had lots of them."

To accommodate the increased demand, Person hired extra staff to man the phones. Sales have increased "across the board" for exercise equipment, but Person said one of the biggest sellers is bumper plates, which are bouncy rubber weights that slide onto a lifting bar, like those used on the bench press. Other popular items are

regular free weights (the nonbouncy kind) and dumbbells. However, receiving any of these objects will take anywhere from 90 days to next year.

"Most everything we have is already pre-sold," Person said.

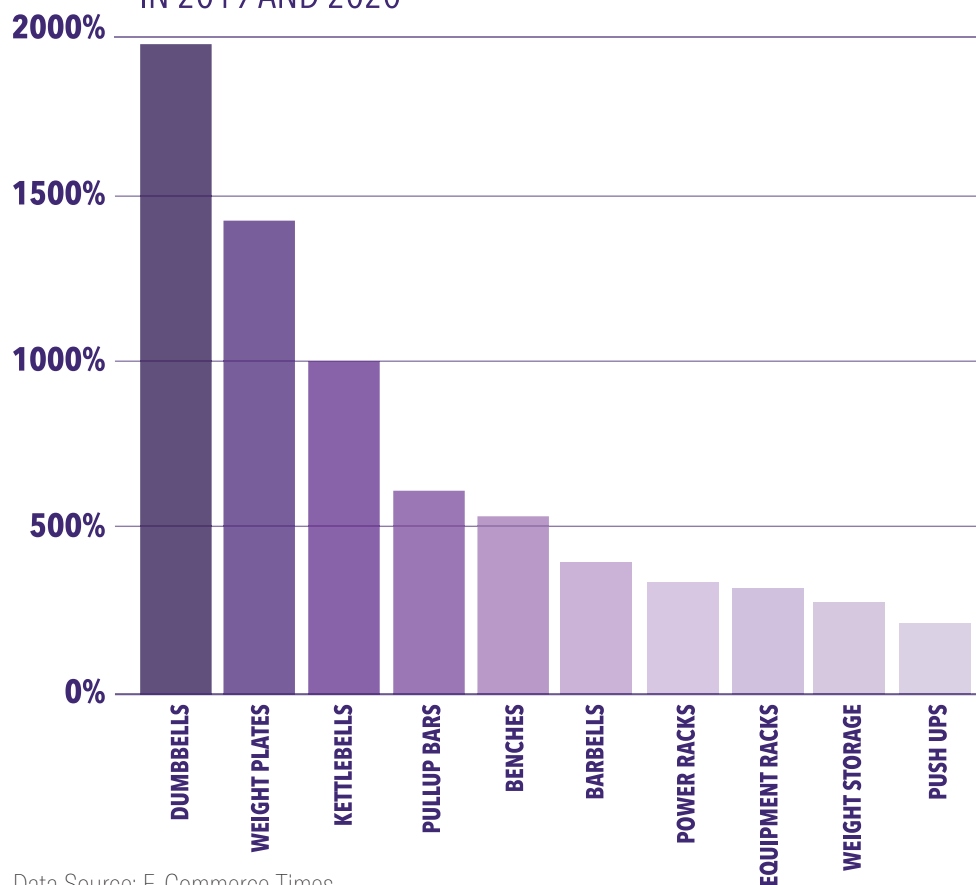
Since the start of the pandemic, sales of dumbbells and weight plates increased 1,980% and 1,355%, respectively, when compared to purchases from March and April 2019, the E-Commerce Times reported last month.

Scott McDonald, CEO of Body-Solid Inc., which specializes in home and commercial exercise equipment, is also having trouble keeping dumbbells and



FITNESS EQUIPMENT SALES INCREASE IN THE USA

COMPARISON FROM MARCH TO APRIL SALES IN 2019 AND 2020



Data Source: E-Commerce Times

weight plates in stock due to increased demand colliding with supply chain disruptions.

"The supply chain slowed us anywhere from a month to three months, depending on where the particular factory was, and then, the demand really started kicking in," he said.

Free weights and dumbbells are often made overseas, frequently in China. Manufacturing and shipping these products abroad was at a lull in March, since its busy season to sell them had just ended. Then, the pandemic hit the U.S., demand suddenly increased without warning, and retailers were left in the lurch to meet that demand, according to Person.

"[Demand] hit at a really bad time for the industry," he said. "Everybody

was fighting to get production back up when they already ramped it down."

With essentially no products available that were high in demand, customers were forced to manage their expectations as to when their equipment would be delivered.

Person said that at first, customers were not amenable to waiting weeks if not months for the delivery of exercise equipment. Instead, they shopped around only to discover that the long wait time was universal.

"I think the reality set in with a lot of people that they now know there's going to be a wait at this point, so a lot of people are pre-ordering," he said.

McDonald said his supply chain woes have improved since March, but inventory remains low while demand is still through the roof.

"In a normal world, we have very few inventory shortages, and we ship most of our products within 24 hours," he

said, adding that now, it can take weeks to fulfill an order.

"It's really about getting more inventory here," he said.

McDonald also wondered when the demand will slow in terms of anticipating future inventory levels.

"I guess the \$64,000 question for me is, do I assume this demand level will increase forever? Of course, it won't, but how long will it be sustained? At some point in time, the tidal wave stops, and you don't want to be caught with a lot of inventory," he said.

Person said that it's not easy guessing when demand will drop off.

"We keep trying to predict how long this is going to go and how much product we need to bring in. ... It's kind of tough to predict," he said. ★

Jay Heflin is business editor for the Washington Examiner.

MOORE

Investor immigrants will stimulate the economy

One way Trump built the best economy in 30 years was attracting nearly \$1 trillion in foreign capital to these shores. This money got invested in new business start-ups and expansions of existing “made in America” businesses. This “repatriation tax holiday” worked like a charm. Millions of jobs were created, and this was a major contributing factor to the American sonic boom.

Now, we’ve been flattened by a pandemic, and the rebuilding job is underway. We need another infusion of investment capital into the United States (and quickly) to get the 25 million jobs back that were lost when businesses went under due to the lockdowns.

There’s an easy way to grease the skids of this early stage recovery — and unlike all the other multitrillion-dollar proposals that Nancy Pelosi is flouting that would send our national debt into the stratosphere, this plan costs taxpay-



ers ZERO. It actually reduces the budget deficit.

I am speaking about creating a new Investment and Job Creation Visa Program. This would give a visa to up to 100,000 foreigners each year who invest \$500,000 or more in an American business or a new enterprise. The investment must create a minimum of 5-10 jobs.

In the early 1990s, the feds set up the EB-5 program, which created tens of thousands of jobs and brought in tens of billions in capital. But the program also was criticized for a handful of widely publicized cases of fraud. These were

rare but cast a shadow over the program. But many countries, such as Canada and Germany, have such programs, and they have successfully attracted high-caliber and valuable immigrant talent. If they can’t come to the U.S., the money will flow to our competitor nations.

The theme of this program is that immigrants who benefit the public are a huge asset. We know that many foreign nationals who would participate in the program prove to be successful business operators. Most immigrants are entrepreneurial and risk-takers by their very nature.

We also know from experience that these newcomers who come with money typically buy homes and spend money on everything from food to cars to education to entertainment to cellphones, computers, and medical products. It is not unusual for these successful immigrants from all parts of the world to double or triple their initial investment through their spending and further investments.

Why not adopt a program of 50,000 to 100,000 investor immigrant visas per year. This would attract \$50 billion to \$100 billion in investment capital each year to these shores. There might be an extra incentive if the investment is made in poor areas where jobs and money are scarce.

The Trump administration has been skeptical of this type of program, but it fits the president’s desire to shift to a merit-based immigrant system. These immigrants create jobs; they don’t take them.

Think of the impact on America’s economic future from admitting each year just one or two more amazing immigrant success stories such as Andrew Grove, the founder of Intel, who came from Hungary — or Russian-born Sergey Brin, founder of a \$1 trillion American company named Google. They are out there waiting to go to the U.S. and prosper. Let them come. ★

Stephen Moore is the finance and economics columnist of the *Washington Examiner* and an economic consultant with FreedomWorks.



Life & Arts

Books A prayer for the untalented, P. 50

On Culture The problem with 'people's justice,' P. 53

Long Life Rob Long's wedding toast, P. 57

Also: Fueling democracy ★ The other father of communism ★ Escape from New York ★ Do vampires do dishes? ★ Land of the lost

President Barack Obama announces nomination of James Comey to become FBI director, replacing Robert Mueller in 2013.



WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

“It’s helpful to think of Russiagate not as a discrete event but as a political technology, a method of abusing the American state’s awesome powers of surveillance.”

Park MacDougald, P. 52



BOOKS

A Prayer for the Untalented

By Will Collins

The “cult of smart” is everywhere. The phrase, which is both the title of Fredrik deBoer’s new book and his term for our collective obsession with intelligence, is an apt descriptor for a society-wide phenomenon. Geekdom and the celebration of academic credentials have become inescapable features of media and popular culture. Despite their ideological differences, both the Bush and Obama administrations made sending more children to college a central goal of their education policies. During a recent Lakers-Raptors broadcast, color commentator Doris Burke gravely intoned that “there’s no more powerful agent for change in society than education.”

DeBoer, a lefty blogger with a contrarian streak, wants to change all that. He calls his book a “prayer for the untalented” — the children who have been left behind by our educational arms race not because they are lazy or make bad choices but because they suffer from an innate lack of academic ability. *The Cult of Smart* forcefully argues that we’re too fixated on “smart kids” at the expense of those unequipped for classroom success. The book is less persuasive the farther it strays from the realm of education policy, but deBoer’s central point is compelling.

When we think about variables outside a child’s control that influence future success, the first things that come to mind are family, neighborhood, and other environmental and socioeconomic factors. Some of these could, at least theoretically,

be addressed by public policy, but deBoer is interested in a more uncomfortable truth. He marshals a wealth of evidence to argue that genetic aptitude has a decisive and underappreciated role in shaping children’s academic and professional outcomes.

DeBoer takes aim at the smart kids, from their tendency to marry within their social stratum to their peculiar consumption habits and their campus antics, but his book is clearly written for the sort of person who did well in school. *The Cult of Smart* takes the commonsensical observation that children’s academic careers are profoundly shaped by their innate ability and buttresses it with mountains of research into human genetics. That this obvious fact has to be laundered through statistics and peer-reviewed research is a testament to the smart kids’ power. American elites tend to resist arguments that their success has been preordained by genetics, but they’ve also been conditioned to accept the verdict of science.

Fortunately, the book is more readable than a dry academic tome. In true blogger fashion, deBoer draws on an eclectic array of sources to make his case, from academic work to fellow blogger Scott Alexander to an anonymous contributor to the website “Edushyster” to the YouTube channel “Cuck Philosophy.” This mix is a reflection of deBoer’s own idiosyncratic background. Although he describes himself as a smart kid, personal asides reveal someone who took a more circuitous route through the meritocracy, including an early stop at

a commuter college. I suspect the book’s critique of our educational establishment would be less cutting if deBoer was another impeccably credentialed insider.

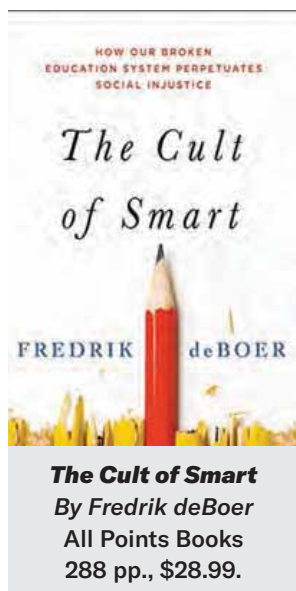
DeBoer’s diagnosis is persuasive, but his proposed cures are radical. The book starts with some interesting ideas about education policy before making a case for Medicare for All, universal basic income, a federal jobs guarantee, and finally, communism. I will not rehearse the familiar conservative arguments against redistribution and revolution here, but I’m skeptical that a more egalitarian state, even a

communist utopia, would topple the cult of smart. A complex, technologically advanced society will always need people with brains to keep things running, and status competition is a human constant. As a teacher who wants to make schools more hospitable to a wide range of students, I would have preferred more about some of deBoer’s intriguing reform proposals, including lowering the dropout age to 12 and getting rid of high school algebra requirements, and less about the coming revolution.

DeBoer is an unapologetic lefty, but he may find a more receptive audience on the Right. At least rhetorically, President Trump has shifted the Republican center of gravity toward working-class voters. Rising conservative stars such as Sen. Josh Hawley now tout the value of trade schools and technical education. Chris Arnade has written against the idea of sending more children to college for American Compass, a newly launched think tank aimed at moving conservative policy in a populist direction. As the Democratic Party absorbs more educated, upwardly mobile voters, the divide between the smart kids and the rest may become a new partisan fault line.

If the GOP becomes more skeptical of the smart kids, it will mark the return of a paternalistic, anti-egalitarian strain of conservatism that has found unexpected support in the new science of genetics. A worthy companion to *The Cult of Smart* is *13 Ways of Going on a Field Trip*, a personal reflection on teaching from the pseudonymous blogger Spotted Toad. Toad’s book includes several moving passages about working with children who just aren’t very good at school, recalling deBoer’s own experience tutoring a painfully nice student who just couldn’t figure out long division. By the end of the book, Toad has stumbled on an evocative model for what our education system should look like. A good school, he writes, should be a rainforest, accommodating a wide range of academic niches, as opposed to just the smart, the driven, and the academically gifted.

I was particularly taken by this idea because I teach English in a foreign country, and there is nothing like conversation in a second language to expose students’ varying levels of intellectual ability. Some children effortlessly pick up English from YouTube, Twitch, and Netflix. Others still struggle after years in an intensive bilin-



gual program. There are few things more painful than watching a teenager who has been studying English since elementary school fumble over the simplest of sentences.

This summer, I tutored a former student for an intermediate English exam. He had been a ghostly presence in my classes, largely uninterested in spoken activities, vocabulary worksheets, and the short stories I so enjoy teaching. But outside of the classroom, he was a lot of fun. He liked to talk trash after blocking my shots in pickup basketball. He was always friendly and talkative in the hallways. He took the English exam three times, and despite our best efforts, he just couldn't pass. But I still remember our time together fondly. And like deBoer, I pray for an education system that is more accommodating of students like him.

Will Collins is a high school teacher in Eger, Hungary.

BOOKS

The Other Father of Communism

By Michael Taube

Anyone who has taken an introductory course in political science knows that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). But most of us know a lot more about one of those authors than the other. We can probably identify Marx as the father of communism and may be able to name some of his other books, such as *Capital* (1867). Some may have even seen his gravestone at London's historic Highgate Cemetery. But when it comes to Engels, most of us draw a blank.

Terrell Carver, a professor of political theory at the University of Bristol and one of the world's leading Marxist theorists, deftly attempts to fill this gap in our knowledge with his intriguing book *Engels before Marx*. By examining Engels's early life, work, and career separately from his famous collaborator, Carver shows readers that communism's other parent was a left-wing tour de force in his own right.

Carver starts his book with a simple question: "When was Engels?" In other words, when did the man who was so

often obscured behind his co-author's shadow acquire his own ideas and theories? Surprisingly, Marx's so-called second fiddle was actually a lead violinist long before they ever met.

Engels was born on Nov. 28, 1820, in the Prussian town of Barmen. His father, Friedrich Sr., was a successful industrialist — he owned large cotton-textile mills in Barmen and in Salford, England — and, like Engels's mother, Elise, a devout Protestant. Family correspondence shows that father viewed son "from a piously Christian and relentlessly commercial perspective" and always had "religious and social conformity in mind as the way to heavenly and earthly rewards."

Engels never forfeited his wealth and inheritance, and he became a partner in his father's firm in 1864. Nevertheless, it was clear from an early age his radical political pursuits would always be at the front of his mind. "His disdain for learning the family business," Carver wrote, "folded into his disdain for philistines in general."

As a young man, Engels developed what would prove to be a lifelong fascination with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the "recondite and highly academic" German philosopher. He enjoyed the satirical poems of authors affiliated with the Young Germany movement, including Karl Gutzkow, and plunged into the Romantic music of composers such as Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn. While highly regarded today, these composers were viewed in their time as political reactionaries. The arts, wrote Carver, were the "proto-public place — limited, contested, censored, and problematic — through which authoritarian neo-medievalism was being challenged."

Engels's first published work, "The Bedouin," was a poem Carver somberly describes as "an unremarkable evocation of a then fashionable orientalism." He also started writing "Letters from Wuppertal" for the magazine *Telegraph for Germany*. This regular column, published under the alias "Friedrich Oswald," provided him with a widely read

forum to discuss the human condition.

"As a 'stringer' for a liberalizing newspaper," Carver writes, "young Friedrich was quite a gift, and of course he was remarkably cheap, probably *gratis*, or nearly so." His politics at the time, which involved critiques of factory work, child labor, capitalism, and religion, were radical but not revolutionary, "progressive and liberalizing, but not — apparently — utopian and visionary." He made his name as a writer by bridging the gap between old, traditional values and new, radical concepts.

Engels attended the University of Berlin in 1841 and briefly joined the Young Hegelians, a group of radical German intellectuals who critiqued Prussia's religious and political establishment. A year later, he moved to Manchester, England, to work at his father's mill. There, Engels shifted "from the realm of *partis pris* but literary periodicals to independent publication as an autonomous, but of course pseudonymous pamphleteer." During this short time period, he pro-

duced some of his finest individual work.

His 1842 pamphlet *Schelling and Revelation* critiqued the "pretentiousness" of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling setting himself up as a "philosophical giant" against Hegel and other German idealists. He wrote "Letters from London" for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, which was edited by Marx (though the two had no personal connection at that point), and for the English-language *New Moral World* between 1843

and 1844. He was frequently critical of English and French socialists and complained that the theories of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus were "subjected by the political classes in England to their selfish interests." He wrote more about economic theory, private enterprise, monopolies, and landowners too.

When Engels was introduced to Marx and they began to work on their first book, *The Holy Family* (1844), their roles were reversed. Engels, then the more experienced and reputable of the two, was the lead author. Marx, Carver notes, "was miles behind," with "just a



Engels before Marx
By Terrell Carver
Palgrave Macmillan
124 pp., \$57.61.

couple of dozen genuinely published items, mostly in his own newspaper, and all quite brief, nothing even so long as a pamphlet.”

Later editions of *The Holy Family* would see the order of authorship switched. Marx, the political firebrand, had “run away with the project” after the first printing, and the more nuanced Engels “gave him license to do so.” The die had been cast by the two philosophers themselves, and history marched in a completely different direction.

Our society wisely rejected communism as a political alternative decades ago. But as we reach the 200th anniversary of Engels’s birth, it’s time to reconsider his role as an intellectual writer, thinker, and philosopher alongside Marx. There really were two fathers of communism, it seems.

Michael Taube, a Troy Media syndicated columnist and political commentator, was a speechwriter for former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

BOOKS

Russiagate and the Wilderness of Mirrors

By Park MacDougald

It’s hard to know what to think about Russiagate. James Jesus Angleton, the legendary Cold War head of CIA counterintelligence, liked to refer to intelligence work as “the wilderness of mirrors,” and the phrase works well as a description of the events surrounding the FBI’s counterintelligence investigation into the Trump campaign — and the ways in which that investigation gradually mutated into the theory that Trump was an agent of a foreign power.

What we know is disturbing enough: that members of the American intelligence community used uncorroborated opposition research (the “Steele dossier”) as a predicate for spying on President Trump and his associates. Through selective and often illegal leaks to the media, these agents — working alongside de facto allies that included Democratic operatives, shady bit players from the intelligence demimonde — and Fusion GPS,

the opposition research firm retained by the Clinton campaign, at first tarred Trump as a “de facto agent” of Vladimir Putin and then attempted to sell the nation on the theory that he colluded with Russia to rig the 2016 election. That lie, and the atmosphere of hysteria that accompanied its spread, claimed the scalp of Trump’s first national security adviser, Michael Flynn, and led to the opening of Robert Mueller’s special counsel investigation, a two-year wild goose chase that shadowed most of Trump’s first term in office.

What we don’t know is how deep the rabbit hole goes. There are still seemingly contradictory facts to be sorted through and plenty of unsolved mysteries. But at the center is a question: Was it a mistake or a conspiracy? That is, was the FBI investigation and the ensuing scandal the result of shoddy work by patriots who thought they had good reason to suspect Trump was colluding with Russia? Or was it something more sinister — a concerted effort to tilt the 2016 election and, after Trump’s victory, to delegitimize him and ultimately remove him from office?

The second possibility is at the heart of *The Permanent Coup*, a new book by Lee Smith, an investigative reporter primarily affiliated with Tablet and the author of last fall’s *The Plot Against the President*. Smith’s own deep suspicion of the Obama administration, the U.S. intelligence community, and the media has made him an invaluable voice on the Trump-Russia beat over the past several years. His work tends to mix damning reporting (for instance, on the shady links between the media and the underworld of spies and political operatives) with tantalizing if often unprovable speculation about who and what might be behind surface-level events.

In *The Plot Against the President*, Smith laid out his theory that Russiagate began as a Clinton operation to use “political operatives and dirty cops to frame her opponent” and transformed, after Trump’s victory, into an “attempted coup” by “Obama officials” to remove

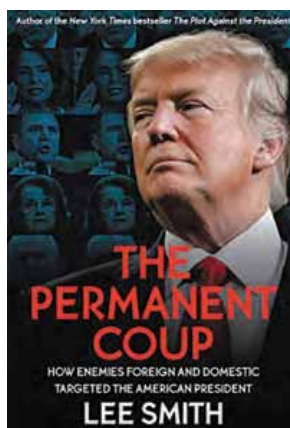
Trump from office. The former claim is fairly well-established, though the distinction between “dirty” and “incompetent” is often in the eye of the beholder. Smith’s latter claim about the “attempted coup” is more incendiary, but there is circumstantial evidence suggesting something more malicious than a bungled counterintelligence inquiry. Smith highlighted, among other things, DNI James Clapper’s role in disseminating the Steele dossier to the media, FBI Director James Comey’s machinations to lure Trump into an obstruction investigation, texts between FBI agents Peter Strzok and Lisa Page referring to President Barack Obama’s interest in their investigation, and the illegal leaking from the administration that led to Flynn’s ouster. All of which fits into a pattern: The Obama administration spied on senators, reporters, and likely on domestic opponents of the Iran deal, and its media playbook for Trump-Russia — using government leaks to push a preferred narrative that can then be

spun and amplified by partisan “experts” — mirrored the “echo chamber” strategy it used to sell the Iran deal, as described by Smith’s Tablet colleague David Samuels in a 2016 *New York Times Magazine* profile of Obama aide Ben Rhodes.

In his new book, Smith expands on his theory to provide broader context for *The Plot Against the President* and to take account of more recent developments — the impeachment, the coronavirus lockdowns, and the

protests sparked by the death of George Floyd. In Smith’s current version, Russiagate is only the highest-profile manifestation of a “permanent coup” by Obama and his inner circle dating back to at least the Iran deal and running through to the present day. As Smith puts it late in the book, “The deep state wasn’t the protagonist in the anti-Trump operation, it was an instrument that Barack Obama used in his ongoing effort to transform America.”

Smith’s book is wide-ranging and at times scattered. It retells much of the story of *The Plot Against the President*, but



The Permanent Coup
By Lee Smith
Center Street
304 pp., \$15.99.

with long detours and modifications. He further develops his theory that Flynn was specifically targeted by the Obama administration because Flynn, as a former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, was one of the few members of the incoming Trump team who understood the intelligence bureaucracy well enough to uncover the Obama administration's abuses. This theory is hard to prove, but it received some indirect support from Steven Schrage's recent revelation that he told FBI informant Stefan Halper before the election that taking out Flynn would be like "beheading" the Trump team, and Smith writes that several unnamed former Trump National Security Council staffers told him that as early as December, Flynn was concerned that the outgoing administration was spying on the transition team.

Smith also takes a deep dive into Ukraine, in particular Joe Biden's son Hunter Biden's work for the Ukrainian energy company Burisma and the role of Eric Ciaramella, a CIA analyst and the suspected "whistleblower" in the Ukraine impeachment process, as one of Joe Biden's gofers when the vice president was Obama's "point man" in Ukraine. The Ukraine saga is bewilderingly complex, as is Smith's account of it, but his basic argument is that Democrats recognized Ukraine was a potential liability for Biden. To protect him, Smith alleges, they ran another information "operation" along the same lines as Russiagate to paint the evidence of Biden's (and, Smith suggests, Ciaramella's) alleged corruption as part of a Trump plot to "extort" Ukraine. It's an interesting theory of the impeachment, but Smith doesn't provide any smoking gun to support the idea that Ciaramella was covering up for himself or that the Democrats were acting with anything like the degree of foresight and premeditation that he attributes to them. The more convincing claim is that Russiagate provided a toolkit — using coordinated leaks from the national security state to create a media circus that would provoke a political crisis — that was ready at hand once the Mueller investigation failed to provide an impeachable offense.

Finally, in a late chapter, Smith speculates that the coronavirus shutdowns and the ensuing racial justice protests have been part of a deliberate plot to demoralize Trump's base and energize his

opposition — all so that Obama, through his former vice president, can retake control of the country and "complete the transformative work he did not have time to finish in his first two terms in office." This theory, which is Smith's most explosive, is also his least supported — it is largely the result of inference from a handful of Obama tweets and from the fact that the former president has remained in Washington, where he has kept an office for his former aide Valerie Jarrett. In *The Plot Against the President*, Smith quoted a journalist who described Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson as "the typical kind of investigative reporter who needs to be reined in from time to time to keep him from wandering into conspiracy theory territory." The same could at times be said of Smith.

But one doesn't have to buy every particular of Smith's theories to recognize that he has put his finger on something disturbing. To understand what that is, it's helpful to think of Russiagate not as a discrete event but as a political technology, a method of abusing, sometimes legally and sometimes not, the American state's awesome powers of surveillance to manipulate the media into smearing one's opponents and constraining their actions. Consider the Russian bounty story, in which anonymous officials leaked suspect intelligence to a credulous *New York Times* in order to frame Trump as an agent of Putin so that they could block his planned withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan — a withdrawal supported by three-quarters of the electorate.

The Russiagate toolkit, in this understanding, is a form of information warfare, an ironic weaponization of the truism that we live in a "post-truth" environment. Critics of the president worry that the internet has broken the media's role as informational gatekeeper, allowing any crank or Russian troll to broadcast falsehoods as if they were facts. Taken in its entirety, Smith's work gives us a glimpse of something far more worrisome: the way in which the institutions that we formerly relied on to be arbiters of the truth have become the instruments for shadowy forces, spies, and government officials to push their narratives and pursue their interests. A wilderness of mirrors indeed.

Park MacDougald is Life and Arts editor of the Washington Examiner magazine.



ON CULTURE

The Problem With 'People's Justice'

By Blake Smith

Since the May 25 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody, activists have been demanding, and local officials have been making, dramatic cuts to police budgets. Calls to defund police, abolish prisons, and move toward a "community" or "restorative" model of justice are only likely to become louder.

These demands are radical but not new. Since the 1960s, activists in North America and Europe have fought to transform police, prisons, and courts in line with a new vision of justice. One of the most lucid of these activists, Michel Foucault, saw where such efforts might lead. In an infamous 1972 interview, he horrified his comrades on the Left by arguing that their vision of justice meant the end of any pretense of a disinterested search for truth.

Foucault's involvement with radical politics began after the wave of student-led protests that rocked France in May 1968. In the eyes of many leftists, orthodox Marxism had been tarnished by its inability to exploit or explain that critical moment. They turned to new sources of inspiration. One was Mao Zedong's China, which appeared to offer a more dynamic form of Marxism. Closer to home, they began to view social groups that had been ignored or despised by orthodox Marxists — prisoners, immigrants, homosexuals — as potential revolutionaries who could replace the disappointingly sedate workers as the agents of overthrowing capitalism.

In the early 1970s, as he worked on what would become his influential history of prisons, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault allied himself with overlapping groups of French Maoists and anti-prison activists. In 1971, he created the Prison Information Group to collect testimony on conditions in French prisons. The Maoists, meanwhile, tried to

imagine what a future without prisons and police might look like. They developed a notion of a “people’s tribunal” that would replace the court system.

Les Temps Modernes, the magazine that Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir had made a beacon of the French Left, gave the young radicals a chance to explain their agenda in a February 1972 interview with Foucault and two Maoists, Benny Levy and Andre Glucksmann. Foucault stole the show, opening with a series of destabilizing provocations.

Foucault began by noting that there was something self-contradictory about a “people’s tribunal.” “People,” in the Maoist usage, suggests a united group struggling against its oppressors. But a “tribunal” is a “neutral institution” dedicated to the discovery of “truth” according to well-defined norms, presided over by experts and without the outcome being “determined in advance.” The judicial system, in other words, presupposes that the agents of the state can be nonpartisan, can suspend judgment until they have considered the facts of the matter, and can decide the guilt or innocence of the accused in “reference to a universal idea, form, rule of justice.”

But the possibility of neutrality is just what the Marxist conception of the state denies — it sees the state’s norms and rules as an ideological screen by which the ruling class justifies its power. Once the working class has brought about a revolution, why would it maintain this hypocritical neutrality? Better, Foucault argued, for the people simply to massacre its foes.

Mob violence did not appeal to Levy and Glucksmann, who tried to argue that a trial would still be necessary for the people to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused. Foucault countered they did not know what they wanted. A trial supposes that the “truth,” revealed through certain procedures developed over centuries of judicial practice, will allow us to categorize the accused as “guilty” or “innocent” in accordance with conceptions of personal responsibility inherited from our religious and philosophical tradition.

The problem, Foucault argued, was that these notions of guilt and innocence were created by the society the revolutionaries were trying to overthrow. Replacing the bourgeois order of police and

prisons with a concept of justice oriented toward the people would abolish the very notions of truth and responsibility.

Rather than scold his interlocutors with facts or ethical injunctions, he asked them why they were only going halfway, still holding on to such tools of bourgeois oppression as the notion of guilt. Foucault suggested that, on the one hand, bourgeois justice based on “guilt” placed responsibility for criminal acts on supposedly wicked or sick individuals instead of on the oppressive social structures that drove them to steal, kill, etc. On the other hand, by insisting on a hypocritical neutrality, it denied “the people” the right to combat its “objective” enemies — in this view, a capitalist is an exploiter and therefore a criminal whether or not he commits what the bourgeois justice system would consider a crime.

Today’s calls for the transformation of the judicial system are mobilized by appeals to race rather than class. They have much in common, however, with the Marxist movements that Foucault knew. Like the old Marxists, contemporary activists decry what they see as the justice system’s hypocritical pose of neutrality. They seek to expose the violence of the present order, and they turn to history to show it is fundamentally contaminated by the United States’s “original sin” of racism.

This set of intellectual moves is potentially open to the same kinds of destabilizing questions Foucault posed to the Maoists. He derailed the Maoists’ discussions of popular justice with two sorts of arguments, one philosophical and one historical. First, he made a critical conceptual distinction between the “justice” that Maoists demanded and the neutral, empirical procedures of “justice” as it is usually meant. The former is a cry of “war” and “vengeance” of one side against another; the latter an arbitration between two sides by an impartial force that can overpower both. When activists shout, “no justice, no peace,” we should remember which form of justice they mean.

In his second, historical argument, Foucault observed that supposedly “bourgeois” structures and concepts were built into the most basic elements of judicial practice, including the very ideas of investigation, deliberation, and culpability. If, as radical activists allege,

our prisons, police, and courts are partisan and we must see that partisanship as the product of a long history that taints not only specific institutions and practices, then our most ordinary and foundational ways of thinking about law and order are also in jeopardy.

Perhaps Foucault meant to push his Maoist comrades to consider (and embrace) the consequences of their critiques of liberal justice. But liberals who want to defend this system and its values of neutrality and objectivity in the face of anti-racist movements must likewise confront his provocations.

Blake Smith is a Harper Schmidt fellow at the University of Chicago, where he works on cultural ties between France and India.

TV

Do Vampires Do Dishes?

By Jibran Khan

What We Do in the Shadows began with a group of friends. Its creators, Taika Waititi and Jemaine Clement, are a big deal now. Waititi is fresh off of his Oscar win for last year’s tragicomic World War II film *Jojo Rabbit* and has just been announced as the director of an upcoming *Star Wars* film. Clement has starred in, written, and directed a number of films and shows, in addition to his role in the hit band Flight of the Conchords and its spinoff television series. *What We Do in the Shadows* returned in April and wrapped up its latest season in June, but its roots go back much further, to a time before the duo was globally famous.

In 2005, Waititi and Clement put together a short film with their friends and roommates in New Zealand. Titled *What We Do in the Shadows: Interviews with Some Vampires*, the mockumentary featured vampires dealing with the unique challenges that come with both being supernatural creatures in the modern world and managing life with roommates. The concept finds much of its humor in the absurdity of this juxtaposition. Years later, with successful international projects under their belts, they would return to the idea, developing it into the hit film *What*

We Do in the Shadows.

Presented as a product of the (fictional) New Zealand Documentary Board, the film follows four vampires “living in a flatting situation,” each of whom fits a genre archetype ranging from a European dandy to an ancient, bestial, Nosferatu-like creature. From the very beginning, it throws the viewer into this strange situation, and the “documentary” conceit is played straight. The opening scene features a relatable argument over chores, which starts out diplomatic but soon turns angry when the roommate who is not pulling his weight, Deacon, is confronted.

“I do my flat chores,” Deacon insists, and his roommates immediately point out that not only has he not done the dishes in five years but that they’re embarrassed to have guests over because of the bloody scene in the kitchen. Deacon responds, incredulously, “Why does it matter? You bring them over; you kill them!” This settles the argument, and Deacon smugly proclaims, “Vampires don’t do dishes,” only to end up guilty into doing them. From this, the film cuts to an intro montage set to Norma Tane-ga’s 1966 song “You’re Dead,” which fits so well that you’d be forgiven for thinking it was written for the film.

This combination of odd-couple antics and theater of the absurd worked brilliantly in the film, and it lends itself just as well to the TV spinoff, which follows a different group of vampire roommates, this one on the glamorous shores of Staten Island. Dispatched centuries ago to conquer America, the vampires have seemingly never left the island, which, as far as they know, is all of America. (They haven’t successfully conquered Staten Island, either.) This group consists of a medieval Turko-Persian king, Nandor (Kayvan Novak), an English nobleman, Laszlo (Matt Berry), and his wife, a Romani vampire named Nadja (Natasia Demetriou). The three “traditional” vampires are served by Guillermo (Harvey Guillen), an ardent fan of Antonio Banderas’s character in *Interview With the Vampire*, whose example as the “first Hispanic vampire” he seeks to follow. Joining them is an altogether modern horror, Colin (Mark Proksch), an “energy vampire” who can suck the will to live out of someone through small talk and conversation about TV settings. The resulting ensem-



**Natasia Demetriou in
*What We Do in the Shadows.***

ble might be the strongest comedy cast currently on TV.

Where the film is short and tight, the show is longer and looser, allowing it to feature a broader range of ordinary social interactions and supernatural phenomena. Episodes hone in on individual situations, such as the vampires attending a city council meeting, facing vampiric justice after their antics derail bigger plans, and taking a DNA ancestry test, which reveals that the vampires have thousands of present-day descendants and that Guillermo is a descendant of the legendary vampire hunter Van Helsing.

Season two opens in the aftermath of these discoveries. Guillermo has been concealing his heritage, though his ancestral talents have proved useful in defending his masters from the many vampires who’ve come to kill them without their even being aware of it. This background also gives the new season more of a narrative thrust than season one, which felt more like a series of linked short stories.

Guillermo can’t seem to help himself from falling into the footsteps of his famous ancestor, at one point joining a nature group only to discover that it’s a front for amateur vampire hunters. Meanwhile, the vampires find themselves in novel situations. In one instance, they panic after receiving an email that threatens Bloody Mary’s curse upon anyone who does not forward it to 10 more people — a form of magic

against which they know no defense.

What We Do in the Shadows is a passion project. We don’t normally think about roommate comedies in those terms, but it’s evident in the fact that Waititi and Clement keep returning to this concept even after their high-profile successes. The show is not a rehash of *Flight of the Conchords* or even of their earlier spinoff show, *Wellington Paranormal*. By placing the action in New York, the creators allow a different kind of story to be told. The city itself is a symbol of the Old World’s aspirations in the New. The vampires came seeking freedom, experimentation, and conquest. They just weren’t very good at it.

Jibran Khan is a freelance writer and researcher. From 2017 to 2019, he was the Thomas L. Rhodes Fellow at the National Review Institute.

FILM

Land of the Lost

By Graham Hillard

Summerland, the newly streamable release from IFC Films and writer-director Jessica Swale, is many things at once: a World War II drama set amid the social upheaval of the Blitz, a meditation on parenthood and duty, a gently erotic lesbian romance, and a pagan

rehashing of imagery most famously associated with Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*. As a motion picture that presumably means to entertain, it is an abject failure, a cramped production in which the characters' surnames might as well be Plot Device and Politics. As a cultural artifact portending the next phase of post-Christian moviemaking, on the other hand, it is worth at least a passing glance.

Starring the English "actorvist" Gemma Arterton (*Quantum of Solace*, #TimesUp), *Summerland* is the story of Alice Lamb, a misanthropic scholar who spends her days reading Norse mythology and chasing pranksters from her seaside cottage. When a London train arrives bearing Frank (Lucas Bond), one of a score of children sent to the countryside during the Battle of Britain, Alice must set aside her solitary life and make a home for her temporary ward. Joining the pair onscreen are Dixie Egerickx as Frank's classmate and friend and Tom Courtenay as a wizened schoolmaster, neither of whom has much of a function beyond occasionally moving the action along. Linger in Alice's memory is the elegant Vera (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), a fellow writer with whom Alice once conducted a brief and ill-starred affair.

Despite the familiarity of its central plot (I await the film in which the protagonist doesn't learn to love the moppet with whom fate unites her), *Summerland* might have worked as a minor wartime melodrama if only a few pitfalls had been dodged. As Alice, Arterton is suitably daft in a role that literally sees her plucking chocolate from the hands of a babe. (The stresses of rationing are apparently significant.) Effective, too, is Bond as the boy who eases his way into Alice's heart, a pro-

cess that owes much to the duo's shared interest in "visions, witches, [and] that sort of thing." Though the two actors do good work in their many scenes together, *Summerland* is nevertheless one of the stagiest and most cloistered movies in recent memory. An Oliver Award-winning playwright, Swale excels at crafting a tightly scripted exchange. What she neglects to do, disastrously, is to show the viewer anything that he or she would be unable to find in a West End theater, a failure of directorial imagination that reduces her film's epic scale to a mere pencil point.

Certainly, *Summerland* is in need of a fuller sense of the world beyond its characters. Yet even in the realm of its domestic relationships, the movie frequently stumbles. It is inevitable, for example, that the rapport between Alice and Frank will grow as the plot advances. In Swale's hands, however, the alteration in question is so swift that the matter feels not only preordained but perfunctory. The hurdle of their initial antipathy is far too easily cleared.

Similarly bungled is the attachment between Alice and Vera, which might have been a source of moral tension (the film is set in 1940) but is used instead as the means by which Swale applauds her audience's preconceptions. Thus, while the picture's erotic scenes are filmed with lyric subtlety — feet nestle beneath a summer sun; a kiss, framed just so, is obscured by a protruding shoulder — its romantic subplot is anachronistic and boring. The movie has few characters; all are meant to be liked; ergo, none dare defy 21st-century orthodoxies of opinion. Indeed, *Summerland's* sexual politics are little more than a cudgel with which Swale batters absent conservatives. "Most people think [we're] wicked," Alice protests in a speech that wouldn't have been out of place in Justice Anthony Kennedy's *Obergefell v. Hodges* opinion. "That it's a sin to love someone. That we should burn in hell."

Who among *Summerland's* makers might have objected to this simplistic perspective? Not Arterton, who has spent much of her post-"Bond girl" career in pursuit of left-wing causes. ("I love going on marches," she effused to the *Guardian* in 2018.) And not Swale herself, whose interviews reveal a predictable assortment of fashionable grievances. Consequently, what emerges in

the absence of any dissenting voices is less art than propaganda. Though beautifully photographed and indisputably sincere, *Summerland* is an exercise in unrealism: an elegant rendering of a wholly imaginary social world.

Yet of all the film's peculiarities, the most striking by far is its devotion to post-Christian spirituality, a characteristic on clearest display when Frank sees in the clouds a glimpse of the pagan afterlife from which the movie takes its name. As previously mentioned, the scene owes an obvious debt to *Breaking the Waves*, the heavenly church bells in which are among the most powerful Christian images in 20th-century cinema. *Summerland*, it should be noted, explicitly rejects the existence of God. ("Hokum, all of it," Alice tells Frank.) That it simultaneously suggests that Frank can commune with the supernatural is intriguing indeed.

In his beloved masterpiece *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis predicted the emergence of the "Materialist Magician," the man who worships "what he vaguely calls 'Forces' while denying the existence of 'spirits.'" Such a person is surely to be feared, as what ethic or creed could possibly constrain him? In its small way, *Summerland* has taken us a step closer to his appearance.

Graham Hillard teaches English and creative writing at Trevecca Nazarene University.



DOWNTIME

Escape From New York, The Drinking Game

By Eric Felten

Let's say there is a mass migration of people from the bleak, crumbling concrete of Newark, New Jersey, to the palm tree paradise of La Jolla, California. Every day, 100 people rent U-Haul trucks in Newark, drive cross-country, and af-



ter unloading, drop their trucks off at a U-Haul in La Jolla. In this scenario, hardly anyone is renting a truck in La Jolla for a one-way trip to Newark. It wouldn't take long for there to be thousands of U-Haul trucks parked in lots in La Jolla and none anywhere near Newark.

It is a conundrum that provides the basis for a new game I've devised, one suitable for playing with your COVID-19 bubble buddies. All you need are some scraps of paper, each marked with the name of a different city, and a connection to U-Haul's electronic reservation system.

U-Haul's strategy for keeping its vast inventory of trucks spread around the country, available whether you want to go from Detroit, Michigan, to Detroit, Texas, or from Wilmington, Delaware, to Wilmington, North Carolina, is simple, though executed with sophistication. If there are too many people moving to a given area, U-Haul jacks up the price. If not enough people are heading in the opposite direction, it encourages do-it-yourself movers by slashing the rental fee.

The pricing is based on minute-to-minute data on where its trucks are and where they're headed. U-Haul ultimately gathers this data into an annual "Migration Trends" report. The report is informative, but since it's an annual exercise, the data are relatively stale by the time they're released. The 2019 report, for example, came out two months before major cities were roiled first by COVID-19 and then by widespread rioting.

More interesting is the real-time data that U-Haul (inadvertently) makes available. The information is found in the online pricing of trucks based on their points of origin and destinations.

Here's how different the daily pricing data is from the annual report. The Migration Trends released in January lists Manhattan ninth among top growing cities in the country. That was before the recent escape from New York began. To maintain inventory in New York these days, U-Haul is charging people roughly twice as much to take a truck out of the Big Apple as it is to bring one in. For example, if you need a big 26-foot box-truck to move your stuff from Manhattan to West Palm Beach, Florida, it will cost you (as of this writing) \$3,892. Go from West Palm to the city that never sleeps,

and it will only cost you \$2,115.

And that overstates the current appeal of Gotham. Brooklyn to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, (all figures are for the big 26-foot rig) will set you back \$2,603. Chapel Hill to Brooklyn, by contrast, is \$492. It is an unambiguous measure of the current attractiveness of living in Brooklyn that moving there costs less than one-fifth of what you're charged just to get the hell out.

Which brings us to the game: Each player picks two scraps of paper, each of which has the name of a city. Players guess which direction between their two cities is cheaper and what fraction (in eighths) of the more expensive destination that cost is.

Let's say I put my hand in the hat and picked Philadelphia and San Diego. I guess Philly is the cheaper endpoint and surmise that it costs about half the freight of going the other way. A quick check of pricing on U-Haul's website would show I won the round. Make it a drinking game (unless you have any driving to do), or make it a betting game.

Before you start betting, it's worth becoming familiar with the magnitude of the current desperation migration. Here are a couple of examples that illustrate, in U-Haul dollars, the panicked flight from certain cities. If you want to move from Los Angeles to Phoenix, U-Haul charges \$1,978. Go from Phoenix to LA, by contrast, and all you'll need is \$186.

Or take poor, hapless Portland, Oregon. A truck to take you away from there to the calmer precincts of Boise will set you back \$1,242.

Boise to Portland? \$91. Anyone? Anyone?

Eric Felten is the James Beard Award-winning author of How's Your Drink?

LONG LIFE

My Wedding Toast

By Rob Long

Once, not too long ago, I ran into an old friend at a party. She was with her new boyfriend, and when I asked the normal stuff — you know: how long they'd been going out, how they'd meet, that sort of thing — she kind of waved her hand in the air and said, to forestall

any more discussion, "He's just somebody for now."

"He seems like a nice guy," I said, trying to be a nice guy also. Part of being a nice guy, as I'm sure you know, is thinking that everyone else is a nice guy too.

She gave me a dismissive frown and shrugged. "I just don't like going to parties and stuff alone. And he's ..." Her voice trailed off as she searched for the right words. "He is not going to last."

As the evening went on, I could see her point. The guy wasn't awful, but he had a braying laugh and was one of those guys who touch you when they talk, a tap on the arm here or there to emphasize a point, which becomes more and more irritating as the conversation goes on.

Also: He was a wine guy, so there was lots of tedious talk about "terroir" and "orange wine" and the "full expression of this grape" and a lot of other things I instantly erased from my memory. One of my most useful talents is the ability to blot things away, even as they're unfolding.

His worst trait, though, was the way he took all of the polite tics and conventions of cocktail party talk literally — as if they were assertions of fact during a legal proceeding.

"Oh, that must have been interesting," I said, when he mentioned his recent trip to some vineyard somewhere.

"No, Rob, it wasn't 'interesting.' It was tragic because orange wine production in Sonoma County is currently ..."

Blot, blot, blot.

"How great to find such an unusual winemaker," I said. "No, Rob," he replied, "He really isn't unusual. What makes him so good is how not unusual he is. For instance ..."

Blot, blot, blot.

At the end of the evening, I pulled my friend aside. "Dump this loser," I said. "He is definitely not the one."

You know how this ends, right? They're getting married next spring, according to the invitation I just got.

And it's going to be a doozy of a wedding. They've block-booked a swank hotel in the Bahamas, there's a "barefoot welcome dinner" on the beach, and the dress code is something called "resort chic." We've been invited to celebrate the "special love" and the "most beautiful moment of our lives." I'm fine with all of that, except that the last I heard, she hated the guy. He was a jerk — "just

someone for now.”

Which will not be my wedding toast, I promise.

On the other hand, there is always some awkwardness at a wedding. There are the complicated Freudian undertones to the father “giving” the bride away. There’s the creepy symbolism of the veil. There’s the best man’s swagger as he sizes up the bridesmaids. There are impromptu jokey toasts at the dinner given by people with tongues loosened by champagne and the “signature cocktail,” which in my friend’s case will be “a fun re-imagining of our Dark & Stormy first date!!!”

I don’t have to worry about that, apparently. The bride-to-be called me a few days after I got the invitation when I sent a short, one-character text: “?”

My phone rang a moment later. She jumped right in. “I know. I know,” she said. “I didn’t like him, and I was always just about to dump him, but then somehow, he knew it. Somehow, he knew that he needed to stop it with the weird laugh and the interrupting ...”

“And the annoying tapping thing?”

“The what?”

“He taps when he talks. He taps a person.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t care,” she said. “And you know why? Because he genuinely loves me, and he lets me know it every day. And after almost a year, I can honestly say that I love him too.”

“Is he still one of those awful wine bores?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, “and I think it’s charming.”

What could I say? I wished her well, told her congratulations, and promised that whatever her feelings had been, they were safely locked away and would never be brought up again, certainly not in my wedding toast.

“Go ahead!” She said. “It’ll be funny. And he knows I hated him. I told him all about it. We don’t have secrets from each other.”

In other words, she didn’t need to blot anything from her memory. She wasn’t erasing anything from the love story. That’s the surest sign that this is a marriage that will last.

Come to think of it, maybe this will be my wedding toast.

Rob Long is a television writer and producer, and the co-founder of Ricochet.com.



LIFE IN UNIFORM

Refueling Democracy

By Trent Reedy

Last year, I told you about my Air Force friend, the KC-135 Stratotanker pilot Capt. James Miller. I had the pleasure of talking to him recently. He told me about his 2014 deployment in support of Afghanistan’s presidential elections, a topic of particular interest to me since my fellow soldiers and I had helped secure Afghanistan’s elections a decade earlier.

Miller was co-pilot aboard his KC-135, conducting aerial refueling operations for A-10 ground attack planes over northern Afghanistan. It was an important mission because if there’s one thing the Taliban hate, it’s freedom, especially if women also have an opportunity to vote, so ground forces needed a lot of close air support from those A-10 Warthogs.

An A-10 flies low and slow, the better to rain down deadly, red-hot liberty on our enemies from its 30mm cannon. This means the KC-135 typically has to descend to provide fuel, but this was difficult in mountainous northern Afghanistan. Miller’s crew needed to descend into a valley low enough for the A-10s but with enough airspace to conduct refueling safely. The problem with the valley the crew located was that the surrounding mountains prevented communication with command and control.

It being election day, the Taliban were out in full force, so A-10s were sucking gas and spitting fire, sending those monsters straight to hell. Finally, Miller’s tanker approached bingo fuel, the minimum fuel required for the aircraft to return to base. As a replacement tanker descended into the valley, Miller’s crew ascended and contacted C2 for clearance to return. Suddenly, the replacement KC-135 declared a malfunction with its refueling boom. Without more gas, the A-10s would be forced to divert to whatever base they could find instead of returning to their own.

Since the malfunctioning KC-135 was in the valley, C2 was unable to receive its transmissions and knew nothing about the problem.

Miller realized they had to act fast. “We can give 20,000 pounds of fuel before we have to sky hook back to base.” Sky hooking is a procedure whereby the KC-135 climbs above 40,000 feet, where the thin air requires less fuel to fly. It involves certain risks to the aircraft, and the crew would require oxygen masks to breathe, but in the military, we often risk possible danger to help others avoid certain danger.

“You sure?” Miller’s commander said.

“I got this, boss,” said Miller.

Miller’s plane returned to the valley, calling the malfunctioning tanker to return to base. Miller radioed C2 to explain their plan.

“Stand by for further instructions,” C2 called.

Miller answered, “Unable. Call back in 30.” They descended into the valley.

“Good to see you guys again!” An A-10 pilot radioed. “Thanks for bailing us out!”

Miller’s team delivered as much fuel as they could and then climbed above 40,000 feet for a six-hour return trip. They had to fly slowly at that altitude, where the lower pressure made it easier to break the sound barrier, which could’ve caused their KC-135 serious problems. Finally, they landed safely at the base in Qatar after a very long day.

Miller never met the A-10 pilots he helped or the soldiers on the ground whom the A-10s help protect. He doesn’t know their names. They are all part of one large, important mission.

“Afghans are putting their ballots on the backs of donkeys to bring their vote down the mountain while the Taliban try to kill them,” Miller told me. “Women are fighting for their rights. That only exists because we’ve created an opportunity for them to vote. That’s what it’s all about. Democracy, man.”

I was in awe of Afghan men and women risking it all to vote for the first time in 2004, so I understood and admired the captain’s willingness to take a risk in his aircraft to help the pursuit of freedom a decade later.

Some names in this story may have been changed due to operational security or privacy concerns.

Trent Reedy served as a combat engineer in the Iowa National Guard from 1999 to 2005, including a tour of duty in Afghanistan.

BARNES

Trump's hogging of the spotlight is hurting his chances at reelection



Months ago, President Trump's political advisers were getting worried about his insistence on staying in the national spotlight. It wasn't helping his prospects for reelection. But Trump has scarcely limited his presence in public at all. There was some hope among his advisers that he'd begin to let his campaign take over and save him for major events and important speeches, at least in the four months before Election Day.

That deadline has long since passed, and the president is as ubiquitous as ever. He's become a kibitzer on whatever seems to cross his mind. He makes minor statements. He insults foes. Trump won't shut up.

What's the problem with this? For one thing, the beneficiary of his hogging the spotlight is Joe Biden, who is freed to sequester himself in his basement. It was the location for the announcement that he had chosen Sen. Kamala Harris as his vice presidential running mate.

By holding press conferences, the president makes it easy for the media to find quotes to attack and phrases to misconstrue. Biden wisely avoids the press, knowing that friendly reporters will let him get away with this. They let Trump get away with nothing. But here's the overriding reason why Trump's public appearances and idle comments are his biggest mistake: They freeze him in place as the No. 1 issue in the election. And the longer he's stuck there, the less chance he has of being reelected.

Doesn't Trump know the spotlight is a danger zone for him in the presidential race? Maybe not. Polls show that Democrats are far more committed to defeating Trump than

they are to electing Biden.

This is unusual. It underlines how much Democrats loathe Trump. They dislike his political views, but it's his personality, his insults, and seeing him on TV that seem to feed their hostility all the more. The *Washington Post* was upset merely by his accusing Harris of being "extraordinarily nasty" to Justice Brett Kavanaugh at his confirmation hearing.

There's little Trump can do to improve his likability. His pummeling of Biden for changing his views from centrist to left-wing may tighten the race by a few percentage points. But that's all. To win, Trump needs an issue, or two, that rise above Trump v. Biden policy disagreements. If Biden skips the three scheduled debates, continues to linger in his basement hideaway, and shows signs of senility, that package could dominate the campaign.

But Trump can't count on his opponent's collapse. It sounds like an intervention too good to be true in Trump's case. Biden might be able to nix the debates without excessive harm to his candidacy, since the media and plenty of Democrats would accept his decision. And chances are, his personality would still give him a lift.

Trump may have to create a "big

picture" issue of his own, perhaps along the lines of asking what kind of America voters want, a country with a recovering economy, a vanishing COVID-19 virus, a chastened China, and better relations between black people and police? That would be contrasted with an America of burning cities, unsolved racial trouble, empty stores, and a still virulent coronavirus threat.

The reverse of that ad is easy to imagine. It would contrast a peaceful, prosperous, and racially harmonious America with a country with the opposite traits. Could an ad like that be made? Would it be possible to tone it down sufficiently to be accepted by a majority of the public? Would the TV networks agree to run it?

Tough, hot-button campaign ads have been aired before. The "daisy" ad against Barry Goldwater in 1964 ran only once. The "Willie Horton" spot against Michael Dukakis was controversial, but mostly in hindsight after the 1988 election had been won by George H.W. Bush. Some Democrats said it was racist. Republicans said it wasn't. But the divisions in America weren't as raw in those years as they are in 2020. An ad touching on racial matters, riots, and crime would surely be denounced and picketed.

An ad that doesn't include racial disputes might work. Two Americas could be contrasted on the virus, the economy, crime, and the country's role in the world. It would lack the punch of being full-throated and might not be worth the effort to produce and broadcast. But Trump needs something to boost his campaign. And it better be big. ★

Fred Barnes is a *Washington Examiner* senior columnist.

"By holding press conferences, the president makes it easy for the media to find quotes to attack him."

ZITO

The presidential race gets all the attention, but state races make all the difference



PITTSBURGH — The elections for which party will control the state House and state Senate in the Keystone State this cycle will likely have a more profound impact on Pennsylvanians' daily lives, their futures, and the futures of their children and grandchildren than the presidential contest.

Rich Fitzgerald, the chief executive of Allegheny County and a Democrat, said state legislators are the ones making long-lasting impacts as they work with offices such as his to rebuild communities and make them better places to live with funding for infrastructure, education, state parks, and conservation projects. "Political party differences are left out of the discussion when working on these projects because these individuals are the ones who craft significant impacts like economic development and transportation in your community," Fitzgerald said.

Compromise is often found with those in the halls of the state Capitol, unlike those who work in the U.S. Capitol, who can run to cable TV to cause a ruckus. At the state level, grandstanding is mostly limited.

Every four years, we are told emphatically by presidential candidates, strategists who orchestrate their every move, and the intellectuals who support them that this is the "most important presidential election in our lifetime" or to brace ourselves because the election is a "battle for the soul of our country." We are warned on cable news, tweets, ads in our Facebook feeds, YouTube clips, and on the radio. It is inferred in almost every corporate ad, sporting event, and by every Hollywood movie and TV show.



Unless you go off the grid for a year before the election, you literally can't escape them.

Of course, the presidential election is indeed important — whoever wins is the most powerful person on the planet. But when it comes to things that affect our daily lives, it is the policies crafted on the state and local level that really make a difference.

Come Nov. 3, all 203 seats in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives will be up for election. Republicans hold the majority now, one that was watered down significantly after the 2018 midterm elections when Democrats here and across the country had a wave in their favor.

In the state Senate, where the Republicans have controlled the majority since 1994, 25 of the 50

districts are up for election. Democrats made gains here, too, in 2018, but still have not breached the majority in either chamber. The question is, will that change? And if so, how will it affect Pennsylvanians' daily lives?

"I think the first thing you look at in this state is how dramatically party allegiance has shifted in the past 10 years," said G. Terry Madonna, political science professor at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster County. "The Republican suburbs have shifted towards the Democrats, particularly in the southeastern part of the state in West Chester, Montgomery, Delaware, and up in the Lehigh Valley. And in the rest of the state outside of those Philadelphia collar counties have gone in the other direction."

Madonna said the question is how local races are affected by the presidential election. Will people be so disgusted by either party that they vote straight-ticket? "[That's] something Pennsylvania voters don't often do. They have historically been ticket-splitters."

He's not wrong. Between 1992 and 2012, Democrats won the presidential contest in this state every four years — at the same time, the state became redder down-ballot in state legislature races. But why split the ticket? Because when voters are voting about roads, bridges, taxes, and budgets, items that affect their daily lives, they tend to vote for their pocketbook, not for party or an ideology.

Plus, your state senator or state representative tends to be the one person in government who you might see walking the neighborhood, at the grocery store, coaching your child's little league team, or in a church pew. They also aren't vying for airtime on cable news. They are vying to

"Of course, the presidential election is indeed important — whoever wins is the most powerful person on the planet?"

make or keep their communities safe, prosperous, and affordable.

The race for the majority in the state House and state Senate here also has long-lasting implications because (in theory) the legislature will redraw the state's congressional and state-level districts for the next decade — if the Democrat majority on the state Supreme Court doesn't interfere again and change it to favor Democrats, an unprecedented move made in 2018.

Madonna wondered, because of what the Democrat-controlled court did, if Republicans keep majorities in both the state House and state Senate but still have a Democratic governor to work with on drawing lines, will both sides be more willing to compromise? "With the threat of one of them taking it to court, I think they might all be more willing to compromise than not."

Outside groups, such as Michael Bloomberg's anti-gun political action committee, have pledged to spend \$1 million to give Democrats a majority in both chambers. He's not the only one: A handful of grassroots organizing groups pushing liberal issues such as a higher minimum wage and climate change legislation are also joining in the push to make the state legislature's majorities blue.

These groups are banking on a Biden win, and they are bullish based on recent polling that gave the former vice president a significant lead in a state that went for Donald Trump in 2016. But before they measure the curtains in the state Capitol, they must remember that Pennsylvania voters tend to split their tickets.

In 2016, Pennsylvania voters gave statewide victories not only to both Republicans Trump and Sen. Pat Toomey, but also Democrats Eugene DePasquale and Josh Shapiro, who were on the same ballot running for state auditor general and state attorney general.

Who wins the majorities in the state legislature won't just shape state policy or draw the congressional map. It shapes the political bench for the future of both parties. These races are more about the future than we often consider. ★

Salena Zito is a senior writer for the *Washington Examiner*.

WOODSON

Black leaders' silence on riots is devastating

In the wake of mob violence and mass looting of upscale stores on Chicago's Magnificent Mile, Jesse Jackson declared, "This act of pillaging, robbing, and looting was humiliating, embarrassing, and morally wrong. It must not be associated with our quest for social justice and equality."

Jackson should be commended for taking a stand, but he is a lone voice and a late voice. For three months, our country has been ravaged by Black Lives Matter and the minions of a race-grievance movement that, under the guise of crusaders for justice, have steadily escalated their agenda with an ultimate goal of undermining the foundation of our nation's values and principles and bringing it to ruin.

As peaceful protests have been commandeered by the perpetrators of violence, in cities throughout the nation, the most vulnerable, low-income neighborhoods suffered the brunt of destruction and have been left smoldering in devastation as the protesters moved on to their next target. Even more disastrous was the impact of the rioters' demand to defund the police and the demonization of law enforcement as a wing of "institutional racism." As a result, police have stood back, and in lawless inner cities throughout the country, homicides and street violence have soared — with scores of victims who were just children and toddlers. Just last weekend, a mass shooting at a neighborhood block party in Washington, D.C., left 21 people wounded and one dead.

Jackson was right to decry the opportunist thugs in Chicago's upscale retail district, but the burning question is this: Where are the voices of purported spokespersons of the black community? And where have they been when the lives, livelihoods, and neighborhoods of



the poor and defenseless have been lost and devastated? Where is the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the Congressional Black Caucus? Does their silence and inaction signal consent to the agenda of Black Lives Matter and the racial-grievance vigilantes who have taken an incalculable toll on those who have least? Does their failure to speak and act translate into an approval of an agenda that attacks family, faith, and entrepreneurship — the foundation which once empowered black men and women to survive, rise, and achieve in spite of unimaginable obstacles?

In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., it does. As the icon of the civil rights movement proclaimed: "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it," and "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Those who were the foot soldiers of the civil rights movement and in whose name the cause was championed have been left behind and forgotten by those who stood on their shoulders. Jackson was right in his recent declaration that Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr., and John Lewis "cry together in shame." ★

Robert L. Woodson, Sr. is the founder and president of the Woodson Center.

CARNEY

County that tried to ban private schooling is allowing private, paid 'learning hubs'



It's hard to understand why a county government would try to ban all in-person instruction by public schools and private schools, then turn around and rent out public classrooms to private companies to hold in-person classes during the school day.

Yet in Maryland, that's exactly what the government of Montgomery County has done. The past three weeks have seen the county try to bar in-person instruction at non-public schools while also approving a plan for in-person private instruction for public school students inside public school buildings. There was no sensible public health case to prohibit one but allow the other, making it more apparent that the county's actions against private schools were motivated by something other than public health.

Here's the brief timeline:

After sundown on Friday night, July 31, county health officer Travis Gayles issued an order unilaterally barring all non-public schools from opening for in-person schooling. Gayles would spend all week defending this order, even reissuing it after Governor Larry Hogan struck it down. Eventually, Gayles surrendered when it became clear he would lose in court to the private schools that were suing.

That same week, the county Board of Education — which was not covered by Gayles' lockdown order — had voted for all-virtual education through January. The following week, the county's public school system approved a plan to allow companies that run summer camps and after-school daycare to run programs that — from a social distancing perspective — don't look very different from a private school in a public school classroom.

The problem isn't that the county is allowing these in-school "learning hubs"—the companies have taken extensive steps to make their programs safe, including small class sizes, masks,

and cohorting. The problem is that a county health officer shut down only private schools, letting public schools make up their own mind, and allowing these quasi-private schools to operate in almost the same exact manner private schools were planning to.

The in-school "Learning Hubs" approved by the county this week will have instructors in classrooms with about a dozen students throughout the school day. Instructors will guide students through the academic work required by remote learning in a classroom with other students, so as to provide "that social and emotional connection that school does provide kids," in the words of Joe Richardson, CEO of local camp provider Bar-T, which is one of two companies planning to open these hubs in mid-September. Kids After Hours, another organization that runs after-care in public schools, will also be using Montgomery County Public School buildings to run learning hubs. Kids After Hours will be using 25 MCPS buildings to run such in-classroom programs.

Richardson explained that his programs would be much safer than the public schools felt they could be: "We have a lot more flexibility: We don't have to deal with transportation or food, and we can control our class sizes, because we have wait lists at times.... We know we can just say 13 children and 2 staff, and that's all that one classroom has to be."

Bob Sickels, founder of Kids After Hours, told me that his program had similar plans. They would minimize time in the hallways, require masks for students and teachers, and sanitize heavily. The program will cost \$300 a week. The school day will include recess times and "lunch and snack" times, Richardson says.

"Parents can drop their children off at Bar-T, they'll be in a classroom with just 13 other students and Bar-T staff members," and we'll help guide them

through their distance learning, and also provide them with the social, emotional education I think a lot of parents are looking for."

They're right. Children need more than just instruction and assessment. They need in-person interaction with other children and adults trying to help them learn and grow. That's why school closures are so unfortunate. If closing the public schools was necessary given the large class sizes and inflexible nature of the state's largest school district, then these learning hubs seem like a great supplement. But if the county is okay with these programs (which it should be), how could it fight so ferociously to prohibit private schools that were taking similar or even more extensive precautions to open safely in small classes with masks and increased sanitation?

The county health office, it turns out, never tried to interfere with Bar-T and Kids After Hours, even while claiming the authority to ban all non-public schools. Instead, the organizations running the learning hubs dealt with the public school system and the county's office of Community Use of Public Facilities.

"Today we met with MCPS and have been given the 'go ahead' to run our Distance Learning Hubs in MCPS schools," Bar-T CEO Joe Richardson wrote in an email to parents on Monday, August 11. Of the public school system, Richardson said "They have been incredible partners in finding a solution for child care...."

Again, why would a county barring private schools allow quasi-school in public-school buildings? There's not much of an explanation based on infectious disease or schooling needs of children. The simplest explanation is a cynical one: The county was afraid of losing state education dollars as parents fled all-virtual public schools for in-person private schools. As a result, the county cracked down on private schools, trying to take away their competitive advantage. Bar-T and Kids After Hours, on the other hand, don't compete with public schools, and in fact partner with them, and thus they were tolerated by county officials.

Also, as Richardson put it in an interview with me: "MCPS was a great partner throughout, because teachers need daycare." ★

Timothy P. Carney is a senior columnist for the *Washington Examiner*.

Sumner Redstone, 1923-2020

Gritty 'happy warrior' who usually ended up on the winning side

By Peter Tonguette

Now more than ever, Hollywood seems like a town in flux. Between changing audience tastes, the advent of streaming, and the scourge of the coronavirus, movie theaters appear on the brink of failing, while studios are gobbling each other up. Remember, it wasn't so long ago that 20th Century Studios wasn't owned by Disney and still bore the name 20th Century Fox.

Yet long before the current convulsions, ViacomCBS chairman emeritus Sumner Redstone prompted respect, awe, and fear for the gutsy, inspired deal-making that turned the entertainment industry topsy-turvy in the 1980s and beyond. Redstone, who died last week at the age of 97, audaciously reimaged his movie theater business, National Amusements, into the parent company of the cable provider Viacom, the iconic movie studio Paramount Pictures, and the CBS television network.

At the time of his death, Redstone's various acquisitions and mergers had led to the current iteration of ViacomCBS, the company that controls Paramount and CBS, as well as the cable channel heavyweights Showtime, MTV, and Nickelodeon and the Simon & Schuster publishing house. At one time, Redstone's reach even included the Blockbuster home video chain.

Once described by *Fortune* magazine as a "happy warrior," Redstone took a kind of innocent delight in the art of acquiring companies. In an interview with the Archive of American Television, Redstone described how he positioned Viacom to take over Paramount Pictures in the early 1990s, outbidding



and outlasting his competitor, former Paramount executive Barry Diller. "I will never forget the night we were at Twenty-One," Redstone said. "When we got over 51% of the vote, I held up a glass and said to my associates: 'Here's to us who won.' ... Barry, on the other hand, was asked how he felt, and I remember his answer: 'They won; we lost; next.'"

Yet, throughout his life, Redstone worked to assure he was seldom on the losing end. The son of Michael and Belle Rothstein, Sumner experienced a hardscrabble youth but excelled at Boston Latin School. He chose to attend Harvard College, by which time father Michael had decided that the family would adopt the surname "Redstone," and, after joining the Army in World War II, made his way back to Harvard to take his law degree. Soon, though, Redstone felt the pull of showbiz: He decided to devote his considerable energies to expanding his father's business, the Northeastern Theater Corporation, a chain of drive-in movie theaters. This became National Amusements, the

unlikely seed from which Redstone's subsequent moguldom sprang.

Redstone may have been a fearsome executive in a cutthroat business, but he was also a member of the Greatest Generation. Consequently, he faced reversals with a kind of gritty, I'll-show-you determination. Most famously, a 1979 incident in which Redstone fell victim to a fire at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston, an incident that led to significant burns requiring extensive surgeries, preceded and perhaps gave birth to the decade when he rewrote the power structure in Hollywood. "All of the most exciting things that have happened to me or I've done in my life happened after the fire," Redstone told the Archive of American Television.

With an unerring eye for media companies ripe for fresh leadership, Redstone took over Viacom, then Paramount, then CBS — each time, the prize became grander, but each time, the bets also paid off spectacularly. Children of the 1990s who feasted on Paramount blockbusters such as *Titanic* and *Mission: Impossible* or who prized CBS's roster of smart comedies and dramas should say a special thanks to Redstone.

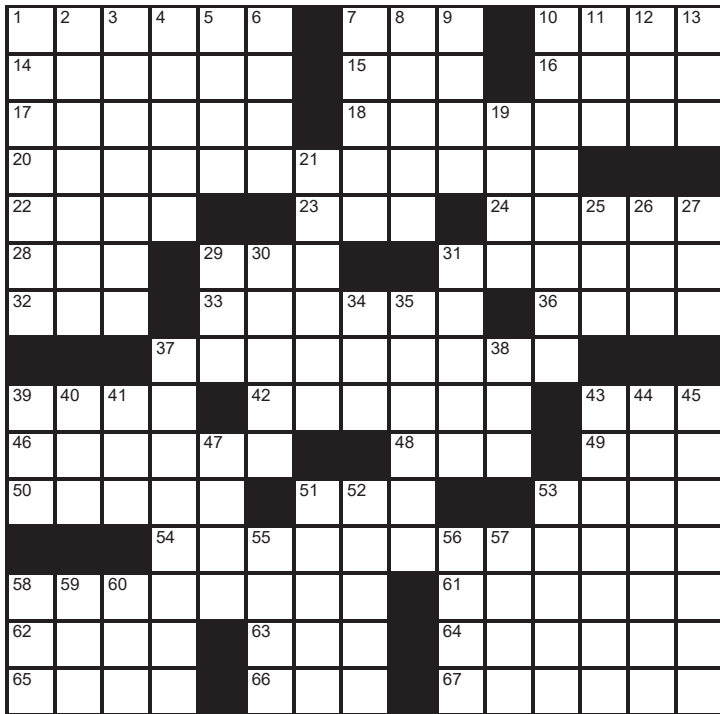
Success like that is hard to give up, and Redstone clung a bit too eagerly to his career. As the end neared, his reputation nosedived thanks to a succession of scandals. There was equivocating about the succession plans for his daughter Shari (now the chairman of ViacomCBS), and, having been divorced from his first and second wives, he embarked on ill-advised romances that resulted in litigation. It was the usual Hollywood stuff, yet such improprieties should not obscure Redstone's hard-won status as an unmatched deal-maker and self-made man par excellence.

When entertainment industry bigwigs die, it is common for talking heads to say they were the last of their kind. Now, they're saying it about Redstone, but this time, it's true. ★

Peter Tonguette writes for many publications, including the Wall Street Journal, National Review, and Humanities.

Toss Up

By Brendan Emmett Quigley



ACROSS

- 1 Plays for time
 7 Elvis Presley's ___ Band
 10 Row
 14 Spanish dessert wine
 15 Pay stub?
 16 Film part
 17 Wings it
 18 Hooters from Belgrade?
 20 Ways of doing things on the football field?
 22 "___ it going?"
 23 Middle Eastern federation, briefly
 24 Onetime "SNL" regular Cheri

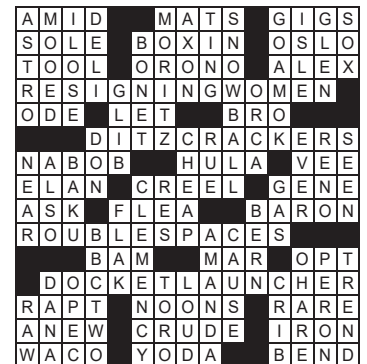
- 28 American ___
 29 Swiss peak
 31 Like vinegar or grapefruit juice
 32 River to the North Sea
 33 Watch in astonishment
 36 Snail mail sender's info, casually
 37 Place to make dinner that's very very?
 39 Exile isle
 42 Field
 43 "I told you so!"
 46 Dormmate
 48 "It's no ___!"

- 49 "Walking on Thin Ice" singer
 50 Flooded
 51 Set (on)
 53 Like some vaccines
 54 Place where pitcher Hamels talks about his feelings?
 58 What gauges real nerve?
 61 Aristocracies
 62 Isaac's firstborn
 63 Thurman of "Pulp Fiction"
 64 Kay Thompson character
 65 Souvlaki meat
 66 Skye cap
 67 Indicate
- 27 Distant
 29 Back, in a way
 30 Leo Delibes opera
 31 A Musketeer
 34 Zeta follower
 35 Cooling conduit
 37 Bulk-buying chain
 38 Flock member
 39 Old NOW cause
 40 Cattle call
 41 Gaudy scarf
 43 Friend of Hamlet
 44 Poetic foot
 45 Its official language is Latin
 47 Corp. that stacks up?
 51 1965 King arrest site
 52 Muhammad's religion
 53 Lover of Eos
 55 LummoX
 56 Listen to
 57 Fashion magazine
 58 Set
 59 Nutty ___ fruitcake
 60 Flight

DOWN

- 1 Under the table
 2 Kid spending a lot of time in the water?
 3 "I'll get that for you"
 4 Retreats
 5 Letters associated with a rainbow flag
 6 Guff
 7 ___ coin (flip to decide)
 8 '50s-'60s Yankee Boyer
 9 Plain
 10 In the style of the "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" poet
 11 Scrape
 12 Everybody
 13 Survey choice
 19 Top guy at the U.
 21 Marketer's target, maybe
 25 Educator's degree.
 26 Purge

SOLUTION TO LAST

WEEK'S CROSSWORD:
FLIPPING SEATS

Washington Examiner

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